

1305

CPHE
PHM) SR8 - 51 (RB-5)

People with a Mission

Whatever May Happen to Me

Philippine Edition

Rural Missionaries of the Philippines



Thelma Narayan

CPHE

WHATEVER MAY HAPPEN TO ME



People with a Mission

Whatever May Happen to Me

Philippine Edition



Rural Missionaries of the Philippines
Quezon City, Philippines

and



Claretian Publications
Quezon City, Philippines

Claretian Publications is a pastoral endeavor of the Claretian Missionaries in the Philippines. It aims to promote a renewed spirituality rooted in the process of total liberation and solidarity in response to the needs, challenges and pastoral demands of the Church today.

Copyright © 1991 by Rural Missionaries of the Philippines

Originally published as "Wat er ook met mij gebeurt" by The Missionary Center and coordinating groups, Heerlen, The Netherlands, 1984.

Editing and updating for the Philippine edition by Mary Grenough

Book design and layout by nsmorado

Photos: *Ed Gerlock* – pages 15, 28, and 68; *Sonny Evangelista/HAIN* – page 41; *Council for Health and Development* – page 42

Published 1991 by Claretian Publications

U.P. P.O. Box 4, Quezon City 1101
Philippines Tel. 921-39-84

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means without written permission from the publishers.

ISBN 971-501-438-0

Dedicated to

*The Rural Missionaries and their co-workers who
gave their lives together with Nanette and Simon in
the Cassandra tragedy-witness:*

Rev. Ben Bunio

Sena Canabria

Sr. Mary Consuelo Chuidian, RGS

Sr. Mary Concepcion Conti, RGS

Sr. Amparo Gilbuena, MSM

Sr. Mary Virginia Gonzaga, RGS

Evelyn Hong

Inocencio "Boy" Ipong

Sr. Mary Catherine Loreto, RGS

Sr. Josephine Medrano, FMA

*and the thousands of other Filipino peasants, indig-
enous peoples, fisherfolk, workers and churchpeople
who have also given their lives as shared sacrifice in
the ongoing life-death-resurrection mystery of being
and becoming the Church of the Poor, Christ's living
and dying presence in the Philippines in our time.*

Contents

Introduction

<i>Foreword to the Philippine Edition</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>People with a Mission Series</i>	<i>xiii</i>
1. The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines and Introducing Sister Nanette	1
2. There was No One to Calm the Storm	9
3. Such That I Must Be Changed by It	29
4. Where Life Is Most Downtrodden	49
5. Of Importance: Not Only the Way You Go; Also the Tracks You Leave Behind	69
6. Simon, Another Missionary Martyr	83
7. After Seven Years: the Philippines in the Nineties.....	87

Appendix

1. How the Law Works: the Legal Case Against Gothong Shipping Company	95
2. Solidarity: What it Means	97
3. Solidarity: Some Organizational Expressions	101
4. About the Contributors	105



"Being a missionary means for me being totally available for, and identifying myself with the materially poor. It means joining them in the struggle for liberation, for these people live in such inhuman conditions that things cannot continue as they are. We must do everything to bring about radical change of the unjust structures."

Foreword to the Philippine Edition

The original version of this book was published in the Netherlands in 1984. Sister Antoinette Berentsen spent only ten years of her brief life as a religious missionary in the Philippines, but these years were uniquely full and significant to both the people of the Philippines and to the people of Netherlands. At the age of 38 she embarked on a new path in her faith journey which brought her to live with and for the deprived and oppressed poor of the Philippines. By the age of 48 Sister Antoinette, or "Nanette" as she was nicknamed by the Filipinos who found her European name too difficult to pronounce, gave herself completely in the living out of her commitment.

Nanette's life is an inspiration and example to us because she made very conscious, informed and free choices about how to live. At the last moment of her life she made the ultimate conscious and free choice to keep giving her life unto the very end – in faith, and in service to the people for whom she had so completely pledged her life.

Seven years have passed since this book was first published in Nanette's own Dutch language. These years have brought unexpected changes in the Philippines. At first the changes were hopeful. Continuing history has revealed disappointing patterns

of a sham democracy with increasing militarization. The hope remains, but its price is continued struggle.

Because of Nanette's very significant contribution to the Filipino people and because of her heroic example, we want to share the story of her faith and life with a wider readership. Editorial changes have been made with permission of the original publishers, especially Sister Nanette's religious congregation. We have added more complete biographical notes about both Sister Nanette and her co-Dutch missionary, Fr. Simon Westendorp, O.Carm. And to bridge the gap between the Philippines as perceived by the writers in 1984 and the present, some information has been updated and a brief current overview is added.

The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines have been graced and privileged to have Nanette as one of our members. It is with humble appreciation and gratitude that we sponsor this Philippine edition of Nanette's life, WHATEVER MAY HAPPEN TO ME.

SISTER ALELI M. JOSE, O.P.

National Chairperson

Rural Missionaries of the Philippines

January 1991

FROM THE NETHERLANDS

I am pleased to write this foreword to the English translation of the book about the life and work of my co-sister Antoinette Berentsen.

During her life Antoinette often spoke about "holy people who taught her to always be available and to keep on the move."

This attitude towards life was very characteristic of Antoinette whose personality enabled her the possibility of remaining steadfast in her radical struggle, without holding back or protecting herself.

No matter how important a person's own qualities and involvement are, the Good News of the Gospel will be given due chance only if the carriers of that message let themselves be inspired by Jesus who is the core of the salvific action of the Gospel.

As a Sister of the Congregation of Julie Postel she followed after Jesus, and wanted to relay to the people: "Look, He is in your midst."

May the memory of Sr. Antoinette be kept alive among us through this book. I can imagine that for you in the Philippines it must be good to vividly recall Antoinette's commitment for your people once again, seven years after her death.

I wholeheartedly hope that these written impressions about Antoinette will be of help in this endeavor. May this publication become the occasion for many to pause a while, and gather new strength and courage as they continue to work for justice and peace in the world.

SR. ANNE BESSELINK

*Provincial Superior Sisters of the Julie Postel
Netherlands*

October 1990

People with a Mission Series

The life of Sister Antoinette became a new volume in the Netherland's Religious Series, *People with a Mission*, published in 1984. Antoinette had already deeply stirred the religious of the Netherlands by the authentic way she lived her religious commitment, by her sense of urgency for a full living out of the call to be Christian. As she expressed her call in 1973, "Within religious life, the search for other possibilities beyond frontiers must always be made. I think that personally I must opt for a life with the least endowed who are without rights – in such a way that I myself shall have to be changed by it."

In October, 1982, she was invited by the SNVR, the inter-congregational organization of Dutch women religious, to be the keynote speaker on the occasion of the organization's Silver Jubilee. Her message was the testimony of her radical option to live and work with the poor of the Philippines who were struggling for their liberation. She challenged the hundreds of religious in her audience to give their active support to the political struggle for liberation of people in the Third World. Her address made a deep impression.

Her words reverberated not only in the crowded audience of those who attended, but also in numerous other places. Sister

Antoinette's life and testimony made many think more deeply; it made them reflect on their own options and attitudes. In the path Antoinette followed, many found strong reassurance for their own new directions. More than ever before, she had become a support for people in the Netherlands, as she had been since 1973 for innumerable people in the Philippines.

Sister Antoinette's sudden death at the age of 48 in a boat accident was not only tragic but heroic. In dying as in living, her life was a challenging example to all who seek to risk all, even unto the end, to be with and serve the people in their work for liberation. Her life is too important to the people of the Netherlands and the Philippines to be forgotten.

To keep her memory alive, indeed to celebrate the life of this strong, passionate and compassionate woman of the church, efforts have been made to gather a few highlights of her missionary life and to publish them in this new volume of the *People with a Mission* series. The publication was done through the collaboration of the Central Mission Commissariat (The Dutch National Mission Institute) of the Netherlands, the Congregation of the Sisters of Julie Postel, the SNVR, the Netherlands-Philippines Group, and the Missionary Center at Heerlen, Netherlands.

For practical purposes it was decided to distribute the task: first Jan Schrama, a member of the Philippine Group with 10 years experience as a missionary priest in the Philippines, gives an account of the ferry boat disaster, and places this event against the background of current developments in the Philippines at that time.

The question, "What did Antoinette do in the Philippines?" is the focus written by Martin Jansen of the Missionary Center. In the reflection by Annalies van Heijst, lay secretary of the SNVR, the results of Sr. Antoinette's SNVR jubilee speech are considered.

In the last section Tom Claessens, director of CMC, gives a description of the footprints left behind by Antoinette. He indicates how they may help us look for answers to our own questions. He points out the ways in which people are working for a church of the poor instead of a church for the poor.

He also includes mention of the Carmelite Missioner who understood this way of being church so well, Fr. Simon Westendorp. This booklet wishes to be a lasting remembrance of the effort and option of this missionary, who in contrast to the very outspoken Antoinette, spoke little but played an eloquent part in the present struggle of the Filipino people.

*Heerlen, Netherlands
April 1984*



**Rural
Missionaries
of the
Philippines**

The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines

The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines are women and men religious and priests who live and work with the peasant farmers, fisherfolk, Moro and indigenous Filipinos. As an organization which is intercongregational and interdiocesan in character, its members are committed to help build communities in which faith and life are integrated.

Realizing that the church of Asia is a church of the poor (Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, 1974) the RMs together with their lay co-workers seek to manifest Christ's concern for the suffering people. By a simple lifestyle, hard work and incarnated spirituality, they:

INTEGRATE with the poor so that, understanding their situation, the RMs are led to share and take as their own the aspirations and interests of the poor, and in the process are themselves transformed;

AWAKEN in the poor an awareness that all have the right to live as human beings, free from oppression and all forms of exploitation;

PARTICIPATE in efforts to build God's Kingdom of justice, truth, peace, freedom and total liberation.

(excerpt from the RMP philosophy)

THE YEAR was 1969. Peasant farmers were organizing. The youth were taking to the streets to demand changes in the country's feudal, colonial and capitalist structures. The Philippine Bishops Conference had focused their latest meetings on the vast unserved needs of the long neglected rural poor. Some few congregations of women religious recognized the disproportionate assignment of their members to urban based schools and hospitals, but felt unable to spare enough personnel to start new missions in the remote rural areas.

Sisters who felt an urgent call to directly serve the rural poor not only prayed. They acted. They organized and named themselves the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines. What single congregations could not accomplish alone became possible with the coordinated effort of several. It was Bishop Julio X. Labayen

Founded in 1969 by the Association of Major Religious Superiors of Women in the Philippines, the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines is one of the mission partners of the joint board of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines.

who encouraged the initiators and blessed the founding group. Founded by the Association of Major Religious Superiors of Women in the Philippines, nineteen women religious of seven different congregations were assigned during the first year.

Two provinces north of Manila, Bulacan and Tarlac, were targetted for the pioneer groups. In those areas there was already much organized resistance against the oppressive measures of the government. On the part of the church, no support and perhaps little understanding or concern was being shown to the victims of this widespread oppression and exploitation. The rural population distrusted the church more often than not, because the

official institution had long been identified with the rich and the existing economic-political order which protected their interests and served the material needs of church leaders so well.

Sister Immaculata Manzano, CFIC, belonged to the group which went to Tarlac in 1969. Afterwards she gave a description of the "wall of distrust" they had experienced among the rural people there. People refused to open the door when she came to visit them for the first time. One housewife lashed out at this meek elderly Sister. "You (pointing her finger at me) are a nun. You come only now to see me. It is too late!" Sister Immaculata did not answer, but asked herself why that woman reacted so fiercely. She was allowed to enter the house and talked with the woman and her husband. Above all, she listened. "When I said goodbye, the woman grasped my hand tightly and said: 'Come again. Remember us.' " The incident made her reflect: "The woman's words struck me deeply. I analyzed every word, the angry look on her face, the dissatisfied attitude and her flaming tone and gesture. I decided to continue this work 'whatever may happen'."

This decision of Sister Immaculata is so like the final words of the 1983 address given by Sister Antoinette: "My God, I want to go to the very end with this suffering people whatever may happen to me." There was evidently, in the circle of the Rural Missionaries, a strong determination which was nourished by daily practice, to which they had consciously dedicated themselves. Determination, zeal and faith – these are the qualities which continue to move the Rural Missionaries toward fulfilling the aims of their organization.

As stated in their philosophy, the Rural Missionaries want to contribute to the building up of

- a liberated Christian and human society, in which faith and life are effectively integrated;
- a cultural life which is born out of the struggle of the people for justice and freedom, and which reflects Philippine values and aspirations;

- a national economy which can pay its own way; and
- communities in which all people can genuinely participate in decision making in all matters affecting their lives;

The Seed Takes Root and Grows

By 1972 the Rural Missionaries functioned as an independent organization with their own statutes, officers and funding. Membership continued to expand both in numbers of sisters and participating congregations. In 1982 the statutes were changed to allow the incorporation of male religious and clergy.

Members are either full-fledged or affiliate. The full-fledged members are those who have permission from their respective congregational leadership or bishops to be assigned by the RMs in their priority areas for at least two years. Affiliate members are those who implement, for at least two years, the RMP philosophy and programs on a part-time basis in apostolates assigned to them by their respective congregations or dioceses.

All members participate in quarterly task reflections in their respective regions and have access to the ongoing programs and services including skills training for community building, socio-economic and development programs, and research, documentation and publications. The Rural Missionaries also provide educational programs and experiences for churchworkers and professionals to help them understand the situation of the rural sectors. They have provided internship programs for priests and religious of other countries who have a desire to initiate a similar group; and have visited other countries to share the RM experience.

In 1990 the Rural Missionaries totaled 146. Of these, 126 were sisters belonging to 25 congregations; 20 were priests from 6 dioceses and 5 congregations. The lay members numbered 22. Present assignments are to 23 dioceses and 3 prelatures covering 33 provinces all over the country.

Introducing Sister Nanette

Riek Berentsen was born March 30, 1935 in the village of Beltrum, Eibergen Municipality, Gelderland, the Netherlands.

Her parents were tenant farmers who tilled a small piece of land and cared for livestock. Because she had to help the family with the farmwork she could not complete her high school. She wanted to become a teacher.

When Riek was 20 years old she entered the congregation of the Sisters of Julie Postel and was given the name Sister Antoinette.



*Nanette with her family before she entered the convent
(at back, on the right)*

She finished high school by taking a correspondence course during her early religious formation period. Later, Sister Antoinette graduated from college with a degree in education, then did special studies both in theology and in leadership development.

At the age of 35, she became a member of her congregation's General Council. During her years on the Council (1970–1973) Sister Antoinette was very active with the SNVR, the Association of Religious Congregations in Holland, providing both leadership and training in the Post Vatican II renewal efforts among the



Her parents were tenant farmers who tilled a small piece of land and cared for livestock.

religious. When she was asked to accept a second term on the Council, she requested to be assigned to the Philippines as she knew God was calling her to go beyond her own country to offer her life among the poor.

The Congregation respected her vocation and in August, 1973 she began her assignment to the Philippines. She joined other Sisters of Julie Postel who were managing the Congregation's hospital in Escalante, Negros Occidental which had been opened in 1967 to provide health care for the poor sugar workers and fisherfolk.

For three years, she worked with the hospital staff and patients and got well acquainted with the wider community in Escalante and northern Negros Occidental. For her, despite the Congregation's good intentions and hard work, the objectives of the hospital were not being achieved. The deep call she felt to live and work with oppressed and deprived Filipinos was becoming focused on the need to find a way of serving which would help to liberate the people from the social, cultural and political forces which kept them in slavery.

She found what her heart had been searching for in an inter-congregational group of religious sisters called the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, and became a member of this group in 1976. Her first assignment given by the RMP was with the community-based health program of the Diocese of Iligan, Lanao del Norte, Mindanao. And her name changed from Antoinette to Nanette. The change was unofficial but it stuck. The nickname was both a sign of acceptance and a solution to problems the Filipinos had with pronouncing and spelling Antoinette.

By 1981 Nanette was elected Coordinator of the Rural Missionaries for Eastern Mindanao, making her a member of the organization's National Coordinating Board. Her location changed to Butuan City on the east coast of the Philippines. At the same time she assumed responsibility as a National Board Member she also became the coordinator of the community-based health program of the Diocese of Agusan del Norte and Agusan del Sur.

On November 21, 1983 Sister Nanette was among the hundreds of victims who drowned when the merchant vessel Doña

Cassandra sank in the Pacific Ocean between Butuan City and Cebu. Other victims included Fr. Simon Westendorp, O.Carm. and ten of their Mindanao church co-workers.

Rural Missionaries Who Died with Nanette in the Cassandra Sinking

Sr. Mary Consuelo Chuidian, RGS was the RMP South Mindanao Coordinator and Chairperson of Women's Alliance for True Change (WATCH). She animated a wide variety of RMP activities from human rights advocacy to peasant and women's support work. When she documented the first hamletting case in the Philippines which was in Laac, South Mindanao, she vowed to continue her work with and on behalf of the oppressed poor.

Sr. Mary Concepcion Conti, RGS was the RMP Coordinator for community-based health services in Tagum, Davao del Norte. She often trekked to the mountains of Agusan in her work with

"They could have chosen to abandon ship before the other passengers, but they gave precedence to the other passengers. Obedience to the call of the poor forced them to the unselfish final sacrifice of their lives." – Bishop Labayen

the peasants. She was exceptionally talented as a teacher and trainor who, at the time of her death, served among marginalized peasant health workers in Davao.

Inocencio "Boy" Ipong, a vibrant, competent and dedicated lay leader, was a member of the RMP's regional staff and coordinator of the organization's Lay Assistant Training Program in East Mindanao. He was among the first lay assistants who joined the RMP in 1975 to share his expertise with the Filipino peasants through education and formation activities.

There Was No One to Calm the Storm

Jan Schrama

Very slowly and fragmentarily the news came in that last week of November, 1983: "Ferry boat founders off the Philippines: thirteen deaths for sure." Thus the newspapers announced on Thursday, November 24. In days that followed, details came in by telephone and telex. Dutch missionaries were reported to have been included among the victims. Sister Antoinette Berentsen of the Congregation of the Sisters of Julie Postel and Father Simon Westendorp, Carmelite, were said to have been among the passengers. For the time being they were reported as missing. Fearful presumptions were not yet openly expressed. From the Netherlands it was quite difficult to obtain a full view of what had really happened. After a week the painful conclusion was reached in the Philippines that hope for finding further survivors had to be given up.

Reconstruction of the Disaster

On Sunday, November 20, a party of eleven sisters and pastoral workers, including Sister Nanette and Father Simon had come together at Nasipit, Agusan del Norte from several provinces of the southern island of Mindanao to take the boat Doña Cassandra to the island of Cebu. There they would meet with others to discuss pastoral programs and to participate in a common retreat. That Sunday evening typhoon signal number 1 had been given

because of typhoon Warling which was raging over the seas of the southern islands. The next morning, although the typhoon warning had not been withdrawn, the *Cassandra* pulled anchor at six o'clock. After the ship had ploughed through wild seas for four hours, the heavy cargo of timber began to shift. The ship began to dip perilously causing much water to enter; there was no rescue.

Panic broke out among the passengers. Crying and wailing drowned out even the crashing sound of the roaring seas which lashed the deck, causing great damage. People clamored for lifebelts or tried to secure a place in one of the lifeboats. The ship capsized and the passengers were pulled down into the cold swirling waters. Many were hit by the revolving propellers of the ship, their blood coloring the waters. That part of the Philippine sea called the Pacific Deep is infested with sharks. Less than half of the more than 600 passengers managed to survive the disaster.

People, the Victims of Profiteering

In the official Philippine press this tragic event was related in a neutral, matter-of-fact way. Very much, however, remained undisclosed. From the reports of the survivors, who kept floating about for 36 to 48 hours before being washed ashore on the surrounding islands, a different reality surfaces. The accumulation of facts brings to light the irresponsible conduct of the owner, the captain and the crew.

From the letter of a Dutch missionary the following picture emerges: "The *Cassandra* was a flat-bottomed ferry boat, which was built in Japan 40 years ago for short ferry services between islands, 4 to 5 hour trips. It was to be scrapped, and had been bought for a trifle by Gothong, the local Chinese owner of the ship. A fresh coat of paint was applied, a second deck was constructed on top which rendered the ship even more unstable, all this in order to transport people like cattle. In the one year that it was in active service the owner made a clean profit of over P11 million (\$1,375 million in 1984). The ship carried no pumps to

evacuate the bilge water. It was commissioned by the Coast Guard for twelve-hour trips on the main sea.

“Together with the seven sisters, the priest and the lay pastoral workers, some five hundred other people were certainly drowned. There were 600 to 700 people on board and only 184 were rescued. The worst thing is that no rescue action was carried out. The survivors were simply washed ashore on the beaches of the islands after floating about in the sea for 30 hours. Even when the ship stopped transmitting radio messages and went off the air, the ferry boat company did nothing to start a search, not even when the ship did not arrive in due time. All Tuesday nothing was done. Neither the Army, the Air Force, nor the Navy did anything to come to the rescue. The ship did not transmit an SOS signal even though two ships were comparatively close by. The captain and the crew left the ship and the passengers in the lurch and did nothing to help the people.”

From the reports it appears that the number of passengers far exceeded what is officially permitted. As a result there were not enough lifebelts available. Of the limited lifeboats, some sank immediately because they were leaky. The captain and the crew were the first to abandon ship and went off in the best boat.

At the time of her death, Sister Nanette was a member of the Rural Missionaries, a group of sisters who give themselves fully for the struggle of the poor in the country accepting the ultimate consequences. One of them added more detail about the cause of the disaster in an intercessory prayer at a memorial service in Manila. “Even if Nanette is happy in the bosom of the Father, I am sure she is crying – not for herself and her companions, but because of the innocent lives that have been destroyed through the negligence and carelessness of the Government, the Coast Guard, Gothong and all the shipping companies. They are to be blamed:

- for their slack rules and regulations as to the seaworthiness of the ship in a heavy storm;

- for too much cargo on board the ship;
- for the negligence of the crew as to the needs and safety of the people; they neither gave directions nor did they distribute lifebelts;
- for the abandoning of the ship by the captain and the crew before the passengers did;
- for the much delayed life-saving attempts of the Coast Guard and Gothong Company;
- for the silence of the media;
- for giving priority to profit more than human lives.”

Against this background the disaster becomes more than a tragic, unavoidable mishap. The missionary whose letter was quoted earlier drew his conclusions as follows: “The loss of Nanette and companions is a very serious setback for the poor and for us who so badly need their inspiration. As a matter of fact it would have been more acceptable for us if they had been murdered by the military. They have been murdered indeed, but by the rotten capitalist system, by the greed of the rich and the venality of Government institutions.”

Sharing the Risk of the Poor

Out of a new understanding of religious dedication the sisters on that voyage had opted for the struggle of the poor, oppressed population. That is the reason why they and the other pastoral workers were found on board a mere wreck of a ship. Just as the accident was no mere chance, their presence there was no mere chance either. They had already made their decision earlier. Father Simon had written about it to his brother: “Travelling by air is so expensive that only the rich people (and the clergy) can afford it. And in these times one had better opt indeed for the way of the poor.”

On board ship they also remained true to their option. Until the very end, the church workers helped children to put on their lifebelts. When somebody urged the sisters to jump into the

lifeboats they responded: "You go ahead; we shall be coming." And they continued distributing lifebelts until there were no more left for themselves.

Their death was no mere accident, as was made clear by Father John Egberink, the Provincial of the Carmelites, during the memorial service at Nanette's congregational motherhouse in Boxmeer, Holland. He said, "It is by no means accidental in a country where 90 percent of the population live in constant danger of their lives, where a whole people is drowned in a sea of misery, hunger and poverty, of disease and armed conflict. Ever since they opted for the struggle for liberation, for solidarity with the people in the neglected rural areas; the displaced, the hunted and martyred; with the tens of thousands who, separated from their wives and children, constantly live in exile; solidarity with all those families in mourning year after year; ever since they made that option, they knew that their lives were in jeopardy.

"They knew it and so did we. They were drowned in a storm at sea and there was nobody to calm the storm. For the country has been robbed and looted from time immemorial. How could safe traffic be possible where there is hardly enough to eat and to drink for the masses of the people?

"You go ahead; we shall be coming." And they continued distributing lifebelts until there were no more left for themselves.

"Antoinette and Simon opted for solidarity with the poor, with the sufferings of a whole nation – the sacrifice of their lives is the utmost consequence of that choice. Like thousands before them they perished in the wild seas of an emaciated country."

Militarization

In the autumn of 1982 Sister Antoinette related: "I recently renewed my vows at the funeral of Diego, a young pastoral worker, who two days ago, got seven bullets in his body, fired in the dark of the night by two men dressed in green while he went home from a party. In all probability this happened because, much against the liking of the military, he provided too much information about the forced hamlets so widespread in the parish. There was a crowd of about one thousand people at his funeral. The funeral became a manifestation of people's solidarity and protest."

The funeral took place in Mindanao, the island where since 1981, half a million people living in the rural areas had been forced into military-controlled hamlets. That means that the farmers and their families are being forced to leave their farms and settle in places allotted by the military. The relocation may be an area along the main road, without guards; or it could be a plot of land just two or three hectares in size where 150 families live together in a guarded camp and where each farmer is allotted a plot of land only eight by eight meters square to build a new dwelling. Mindanao is the island where 60 percent of the Philippine Army was concentrated, no less than 80 percent of it being garrisoned in the eastern provinces where Nanette and Simon were assigned. This is the area where foreign agri-business was advancing. In 1980 the government allotted more than 80,000 hectares of fertile agricultural land in Agusan Province to foreign estates including the British-Malayan Guthrie Group which had planted 8,000 hectares with palm-oil trees imported from West Africa. In the long run, palm-oil is projected to replace the Philippine staple, coconut oil (copra), because it was cheaper to produce and has larger possibilities for practical application in businesses like Unilever. But the takeover of peasant farm lands is creating hunger and poverty, as the Filipinos are deprived of the use of land they desperately need for rice, coconuts, vegetables and support of livestock.



Nanette was familiar with the mountains and fields and those whose life depend on the land

Between 1972 to 1983, the Philippine Army expanded from 60,000 to 300,000. The large number of military in Mindanao (60 percent of the total) was officially ascribed to the increased activities of the resistance movement in this island. In the mid-70's the Army was very much engaged in fighting the insurgent Muslims who had united in the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front). But now the reason for government military presence was actually to protect the interests of the foreign companies and consequently, to crush the opposition of the local peasant farmers and the growing resistance of the New People's Army (NPA). This was no soft-handed business. Documentation from the Human Rights Commission in Agusan showed that in the course of three months (November 1981 to January 1982) in that province only, 86 people were murdered. The actual number of victims was probably much higher, but not all cases could be documented. In March 1983 in the same district, 19 people were killed in one week.

Most cases of terror were reported as activities of a para-military gang under the command of an ex-colonel of the Philippine Army, Carlos Lademora. This gang carried out the dirty jobs for the official army and was paid directly by the Philippine Government's Minister of Defense. The Guthrie palm oil plantation was being guarded by members of this group called "The Lost Command." In September 1981, this same "Lost Command" massacred almost all the inhabitants in a little village on the island of Samar. Only three people survived the butchery which took place on the estate of Juan Ponce Enrile, Marcos' Minister of Defense. Other para-military gangs are active throughout the Philippines. They are comparable to the death squads so notorious in several Latin-American countries.

At the end of 1982, Sister Mariani Dimaranan, the National Coordinator of the Task Force Detainees had the following to say regarding the question whether the increase of militarization made itself felt all over the country: "Oh yes, that is evident from our information. TFD has offices in the different districts of the country, and other organizations also gather similar facts. The

intensifying of the militarization makes itself felt in all sorts of forms and degrees from north to south, and from east to west. I do not know how much worse things will become; but I have a strong suspicion that Marcos, after his visit to the United States, will make his grip on the people tighter still, the more so because everywhere and in every sector he experiences the growth of organized resistance.

"We notice that, at the moment, Marcos is directing his attention to all sorts of church programs. Thus in the last few months several offices of TFD were raided, among others, in Panay and Samar. Religious are being increasingly threatened by the military. I fear that our work will become ever more difficult, but we are determined to go on whatever action the military may take against us. In Cagayan de Oro City, 1,000 more policemen have been appointed. Cagayan de Oro is notorious for its multinationals. Local resistance is strong. My simple analysis is that the military are there where the country is rich in natural resources; where, therefore, the multinationals are also active. And you see them where the resistance is strong. It is also evident that the United States plays a part in the intensifying of militarization, since they want to defend the interests of the multinationals."

U. S. Role and Military Bases in the Philippines

The United States played an important part in the support of the Marcos regime. The Philippines really passed through two colonial periods: first, the Spanish from 1521 to 1898; in that period large landownership was introduced as part of the feudal system. It was also the era when the people were baptized into the Catholic Church, even if sometimes it happened at the point of a gun. The second colonial period (1898–1946) began when the United States came to "rescue" the Filipino people against the Spaniards. But the real story was that at the time the Filipino revolutionaries were just about to overthrow the Spanish colonial government, Spain arranged a deal with the U. S. government

to stage a mock battle in Manila Bay to pretend that the U. S. had defeated Spain, and could thus become the new rulers. To formalize this arrangement, an agreement was made with the help of the Vatican for the U. S. to pay \$20 million to Spain for the exchange. Part of the agreement was that the church was entitled to keep its vast "Friar Estates" and all other church property, even though these had been accumulated by the Spanish during their centuries of powerful presence. Not only church property, but all the extensive hacienda lands were maintained as a system. With the presence of the U. S. who were at the peak of early industrialization, the Philippines became a vast supply source for natural resources including timber, precious ores as gold, silver and copper, as well as a source of cheap sugar, coconut and tobacco. The U. S. claimed rights equal to Filipinos in land ownership, use of natural resources, and business transactions. The economy began to expand (in favor of the U. S.) notably through the massive export of raw materials at give-away terms..

An independent Philippines industrialization program has never had a chance to develop, as a dependency economy was and remains part and parcel of the relationship between the United States and the Philippines. After World War II, as a token acknowledgement of the invaluable and costly role Filipinos played and paid for during that war, the U. S. granted to the country in 1946 what is now called "flag independence". However, a pro-U. S. elite ran the country. Part of the economic and political pressures demanded for even this so-called independence was that U. S. citizens would continue to have parity rights (equal access to land and business ownership); taxation and import-export policies would continue to favor U. S. interests; and the extensive U. S. military bases would be allowed to remain and function freely in the Philippines. When the 1987 Constitution was ratified, it reflected the strong awareness of the Filipino people that their rights and sovereignty have been violated repeatedly. Several of its provisions make the continued presence of the bases a violation of the intent of the Constitution.

Even at the time of this writing (1991) the United States maintains two of its largest bases in the Philippines, the Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base. Besides these, there are some other military installations on Philippine soil – vital links in the U. S. nuclear air and sea missile programs. Between the years 1983 to 1988, the U. S. paid only \$900 million as recompense for “continued unhampered use of the bases”: \$425 million of this sum had to be spent on *military* purchases – *from the U. S.!* The U. S. Armed Forces based in the country have been known to render direct support to the Philippine Armed Forces against Filipinos who are resisting the exploitative socio-political systems. This direct support includes the giving of advice for anti-demonstration and anti-guerilla activities, and also providing aerial maps, equipment and information to the intelligence network of the Philippine Government.

Another clear evidence of U. S. military involvement in the Philippines is what is called “joint military maneuvers.” Not long ago, the largest yet of such maneuvers conducted in the whole of Southeast Asia was staged in the Pacific coast province of Aurora. Fourteen thousand heavily armed soldiers (U. S. and its military allies) and fifteen warships took part in the activities. Understandably, the poor fisherfolk and Negritoes who are already suffering from Philippine military, were terrified that they were being invaded once again by the U. S. military war machine.

The interests of the United States were said to be mainly concerned with the U. S. policy of encirclement of the Soviet Union and the “protection of the sea lanes” of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Since the “weapons race” between the two world powers increased weaponry in numbers, destruction and kill-power, the bases became even more important. It was the intention of the U. S. to install cruise-missiles in the Philippines, thus making the Philippines a Pacific frontier in the American defense just like Europe.

Besides this strategic importance, the permanent presence of American forces and support of the Marcos regime meant at the same time a solid defense of U. S. and other multinationals’

economic interests. With the military-industrial tie-up, the U. S. bases constitute an important link in the continuing exploitation and oppression of the overwhelming majority of the Philippine population.

The Health Care Problem

Sister Nanette started her work in the Philippines in a hospital. But she soon discovered that hospitals are for the well-to-do. The poor farmers and fishermen, sugarcane field workers and the underpaid industrial workers cannot afford hospital care. She saw the government health care as inadequate for the needs of the poor. Education and training for health professionals was expensive and based entirely on a western model. The end product of this training scheme could serve well in Manila's expensive hospitals or abroad. But the common people in the Philippines die outside of hospitals, as victims of pneumonia, tuberculosis, malnutrition and diarrhea; diseases which in themselves need not be fatal but cause death because the poor lack food and live in incredibly unsanitary circumstances – the result of low wages and other injustices. Nanette perceived that health care must not be detached from the total socio-economic and political situation.

She invited Dr. Jaime Galvez Tan to meet some of the Magdalen Hospital staff, knowing his approach to this issue. It was Dr. Jimmy Tan who declared that "Doctors who consider themselves first and foremost as Filipinos and secondly as doctors cannot stay outside the political arena. We must be conscious of, and realize all that happens around us. We must join the farmers, the fisherfolk, the workers, tribal groups, the poor in the towns, students and other professional groups in their struggle for nationalism and democracy. We must utilize our experience in the field of health care for the overwhelming majority of our poor, destitute and oppressed people. The task that awaits us is great, and the struggle will be long."

Economic Conditions

Tension between the Filipino workers and the Marcos regime was increasing. The 18 million workers struggled with the regime which was sinking deeper and deeper into severe economic crisis. Estimates given by the Department of Labor were that one-third of the professional population was entirely or partly unemployed. Many others were underemployed. Wages of workers with full-time jobs were not half sufficient for a minimal human existence. Since the proclamation of martial law in 1972, wages had dropped in real value by about 40 percent by 1984. The development scheme of the Government, supported by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (its international creditors) has forced this wage-drop through in an effort to enlarge the Philippine advantage to foreign investors in comparison with trade competitors in the Third World. In the meantime, strikes were prohibited under a martial law Executive Order.

From the early years of U. S. rule in the country, U. S. policy-makers created the Philippine educational system in order to keep the Filipinos "quiet" and to make them accept the new colonial domination. This educational system made the Filipino a "good" *subject*, schooled in U. S. tradition and culture, taught to consider "West is best." The English language was the official language of government and education until the late 1960's. Students who used any of the Filipino languages within the school, even during their free time, were punished. Much of the rich experience of Philippine history became lost to the generations born after 1898.

In his book, *The Miseducation of the Filipino*, Renato Constantino sums up a number of key ideas which Filipinos were taught in school. These included: "the American economic, political and social institutions are the best in the world"; "The Philippines is unfit for industrialization"; "the United States is a very benevolent state, destined to assume the leadership of the whole world."

Thus the United States got the chance to exploit the rich resources of Philippine raw materials for the benefit of their own industries. After the declaration of Martial Law, the country

opened a number of Export Processing Zones. Foreign companies, notably American, but also Japanese and European, increasingly came to establish themselves in as well as outside the so-called Free Trade Zones because they were benevolently allowed by the Philippine government to transfer all profits to their homelands. They were even given generous tax exemptions, and were promised a low-paid, docile work force which the government prohibited from going on strike! The educational system kept pace with these new developments. Stress was laid by the Department of Education on the technical/vocational subjects to produce qualified technicians without skills of critical analysis, to supply the needs of the export oriented, multinational industries. This policy was embedded in the Education Act of 1982. The World Bank financed the introduction of this program.

Only in 1983 did the Philippine business world begin to withdraw its confidence in Marcos and his foreign-dependent economy. Its failure became ever more evident. The external debt of \$2.2 billion in 1972 rose to \$24 billion by December 1983. New loans no longer sufficed to pay even the interests of the outstanding debt. International financing institutes hold almost complete control over the Philippine economy. In order not to fall into disfavor with the credit institutions, foreign dictates such as devaluation and more liberal importation policies, forced low wages, anti-labor, anti-Philippine industrialization policies were swallowed.

Growing Resistance

The Marcos regime with its US-supported policies became visibly isolated. The poor tenants and farmers and exploited workers discovered that in the long run there was no salvation to be expected from such a system. In the countryside the revolutionary advance could no longer be stopped. Millions of farmers began to identify themselves with the resistance fighters because they realized it was their own fight that was being fought.

The workers became sick of serving as a balancing item in a bankrupt state economy. They would no longer be misled by the so-called "yellow" trade unions which are controlled by the top people of the industries. The most enlightened and militant are united in the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), the May 1st Movement founded May 1, 1980 at a meeting attended by 25,000 Filipino workers. KMU is an organization of Filipino workers which openly stands for an authentic nationalist workers' movement. In 1984 KMU represented about 250,000 workers of nine trade unions and more than a hundred local unions. By 1990 its members include 800,000 workers of eleven major national unions plus other local unions.

The center of workers' actions of protest and strike remains Metro Manila, the industrial center of the Philippines. But there are clear signs that the workers movement is strengthening all over the country. The workers organizations have also established strong bonds with groups of farmers, fisherfolk and with employees of big factories in the Philippine countryside.

The "middle sector" including health and education sectors, also began to stir in the early 80's. First and foremost because they realized that they, too, were becoming victims of an unjust and worsening economic situation, notably due to rising prices and taxes. At the same time they realized more and more that public health care and education institutions render little or no service to the poor; on the contrary these service sectors have become estranged from the common people and because of their foreign orientation, more often serve the rich Philippine elite or foreigners. Coordinated resistance of millions of Filipinos manifested itself on two different levels: "above ground" in all sorts of legal but critical organizations, and "underground" through the growing National Democratic Front (NDF). The NDF program declares the right of the Filipino people to give shape to their own future, to be free from foreign domination, and free also from oppression and exploitation by the internal elite.

The Church and the Struggle of the People

The way things were carried out by Cardinal Sin of Manila was frequently characterized as unpredictable. According to a wry joke, unpredictability is his greatest strength! At the funeral of the murdered opposition leader, Ninoy Aquino, he uttered fierce criticism of Marcos, and also expressed that the time had come for Marcos to resign. Yet, the next moment he stood on the doorstep of the Presidential Palace in a confidential talk with Marcos to plead for the institution of a Commission of Appeasement. On the other hand, Sin's attitude was not so unpredictable. In spite of all his criticism of the present situation, it was unquestionable that armed resistance was unacceptable to him and that communism must be fought. Institutionally, with the overwhelming majority of the country's bishops, he has favored the status quo. Some bishops raise their voices against excesses in the violation of individual human rights. Even on that high hierarchical level, there are exceptional bishops who sympathize with radical forms of popular resistance which at the base level of church is supported by the Christians for National Liberation (CNL).

History is showing that as the bishops take the liberation struggle seriously, they are no longer secure from attack by the regime. One of them, Bishop Purugganan, Bishop of the Diocese of Ilagan, Isabela (which has established a special bond with the Diocese of Groningen in the Netherlands) experienced this when, on August 24, 1983 at two o'clock in the morning, 50 soldiers raided and searched his house. Priests, sisters and pastoral workers are now becoming used to anxiety caused by the military and would not be surprised to eventually be taken prisoner on the charge of subversive activities, communistic leanings, or siding with rebels from the New People's Army. The network of "Government Regime-CIA-Reactionary Church" seems to become tighter around the church personnel who have clearly opted to be with the poor in their struggle for liberation. In the end it will be the reactionaries themselves who will get entangled in their own nets. Revolutionary pastoral workers and lay people

do not stand by themselves. They do not serve self-interest or church-interest, but only the cause of the people. They also know that the church does not want them to take the initiative in the struggle. Each sector organizes itself from the basic principle that the farmers and workers will take the lead. As an organization, the church will not play a great part in the political revolution.

But the radical churchworkers stick to their posts. The popular church may yet become a vital force in the revolution. People who participate in the struggle as part of their own social sector become further inspired when they meet around the stories of Jesus actualized revolutionarily.

The Aquino Murder

Since August 24, 1983 "the fat has been cast into the fire." The well known opposition leader Benigno Aquino returned to the Philippines after a three-year exile in the United States to take his chance in an election struggle against Marcos scheduled for May 1984. The Marcos camp settled their account with him in a horrible way. Upon landing, Aquino was murdered in cold blood on the steps of the plane. The murder of the charismatic leader of the traditional opposition became an emotional occasion for an outburst of pent-up anger from all sectors against the Marcos regime. After the funeral of Aquino it soon became evident that the demonstrations of the hundreds of thousands far exceeded a show of sympathy for Aquino. The existing resistance movement of millions of Filipinos grabbed the occasion to make known all grievances against the Marcos regime. The occasion provoked a seemingly spontaneous outcry, the shouts of a subjugated people trying to break their chains. The chains were not only of the Marcos regime, to be sure; the slogans in the demonstrations gave evidence of deep anti-American sentiment in the form of indictments against the presence of American multinational companies and military bases, perceived as threat for intervention. Cooperation expanded. The old traditional opposition made itself heard again; its leaders once again surfaced. But the

majority of the people did not back them up. It was the popular organizations of farmers, workers, and urban poor, of students, teachers, healthcare workers and church people which showed the mass character of the resistance at that time. The two tracks in the opposition came together in new organizations and alliances in an effort to achieve political unity. The leaders of the radical underground resistance could not take the risk of surfacing openly. The most critical leaders of the official open opposition were prepared to assume that task.

The Story of Dong

A few months before her death Sister Nanette forwarded this story to the Netherlands. It was the story of a boy in Agusan del Sur which characterized the situation in which Nanette worked during her last years. An American missionary nurse who worked for six months in the community-based health program in east Mindanao wrote it. This was the story.

Dong looks like a 12-year old but his thin arms and horribly swollen belly show that he is not a healthy boy. On closer inspection we discovered that Dong is 16 years old and shows all the symptoms of a person suffering from chronic schistosomiasis (snail fever).

Schistosomiasis is endemic in the island of Mindanao. The emaciated body and swollen belly are easy to detect among the unfeebled countryfolk. This disease slowly eats life away. First it affects the liver, and later on other organs in the abdomen. In the last stage it affects the brains. In the end the patient is so badly weakened that common cold develops into a fatal pneumonia. Dong probably contracted this fearful disease when working in a rice field or when playing in water infected by slugs. The slug serves as a host for the schistosomiasis bacillus. When properly treated schistosomiasis can be cured, but in that case the patient must be well fed. This is often impossible because of bitter poverty. That is why each year many people die of this disease.

But there is more to this story. Dong lost his father a short time ago, as did 35 other children in his village. Dong's father did not die of schistosomiasis but was killed by bullets together with eleven other

farmers in his village. He was murdered one sunny afternoon of this year (1983). The survivors related that thirteen masked and armed men came into the village claiming to be members of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed resistance group which is in opposition to the present regime. They forced one farmer to gather the others in the barrio hall for a meeting. But instead of holding a meeting the farmers were lined up by the armed men. Before starting to fire their guns they said: "We murder you, farmers, because you are members of the NPA." And so they did.

There is still more. The day after the massacre, unknown men approached the few farmers left in the village, those who had not evacuated. They asked the farmers if they were willing to sell their land for a good price. The village where Dong lives is situated in a district where a large multinational company is hard at work, extending its enormous palm oil plantation. There is little need to wonder whether there is a connection between the massacre and the men who wanted to buy the land.

*In such a situation, what is the task of a nurse
and a Christian?*

Experiences like these have taught me, as a nurse and a Christian, that even helping prevent schistosomiasis is a mere "eye-wash." It is clear that the wholistic Christian task consists in treating, preventing, supporting and working for justice.

Like several of my co-workers, it did not take long for me to find out that these aspects cannot be separated from one another. Can they, indeed, be separated in the American or the European situation, either?

It is evident that Dong will not receive medical treatment. It is also certain that he will not get his father back. And it is almost certain that there will be no justice for him under the present system. In such a situation, what is the task of a nurse and a Christian?



These are the people who can't use the hospitals.

Such That I Must Be Changed by It

Martin Jansen

“In spite of all possible care, two children in one family died this week of measles. Measles by itself is not so bad, but often the child is undernourished and pneumonia or something else develops. So it was in this case. In the morning the first child died. Immediately afterwards the second child was taken to the hospital, and also died. In the afternoon the third child was taken ill and was also taken to the same hospital. As no payment had been made for the other child – the parents had no money – the hospital staff did not want to give this child medical treatment before payment was made. So somebody had to be found who was willing to lend money. Imagine what this means to those parents.”

The passages above are taken from a letter Sister Nanette wrote in July, 1983 to the teachers of an elementary school at Boxmeer. It gives a picture not only of the situation in the Philippines, but also of the way that Nanette viewed it. Not from afar and reflectively, but very much involved and with love for the people. When Nanette spoke about her work it was always very much to the point; about real people with real problems.

Outspoken

A few months after Nanette's death, one of her closest co-workers wrote to a friend in the Netherlands about how she saw the role of Nanette in East Mindanao. "Her role and function in the health program was very great and the way she carried out that program was most relevant. She was outspoken and straight, and I learned a great deal from her style and manner of working. She had things well-ordered, and there was no stopping her. Sometimes I was surprised how she managed things. All the days in her calendar were crammed with appointments for work. I "pulled her leg" occasionally saying, 'Nanette, I think we shall have to make a calendar which has 45 days in a month,' and then we had a good laugh together."

Further on in the same letter she writes what Nanette meant for her, personally, and no doubt not only for her. "For me, Nanette was an example of an ideal religious. I worked about three years with her and learned a lot from her. I very often went to see her in the house at Butuan to consult her, or for exchange of our work experiences in the districts where I work. She was able to listen very well and tried very enthusiastically to understand our culture. Although Nanette was white-skinned, I never looked up to her as a superior person. I considered her equal; the same as myself. I did not look up to her as a superior because she was a coordinator of the health program, but saw her as my co-worker, somebody you cooperate with. We were able to build up a relationship as sisters in a community where the spirit of cooperation has gained a footing. There was no gap. She was always open to you. I was helped by her with my problems, my fears and anxieties in the area where I am active. She gave us much support and inspired us with hopefulness and encouragement."

In turn, Sister Nanette experienced much encouragement and consolation from people around her. In one of her last letters she wrote: "Sometimes I am almost paralyzed by the brutality of the military, but then again I am put on my feet by Filipinos who are

not subdued. That is encouraging." The death of Nanette has certainly been a serious blow for her closest co-workers. Yet, as many letters show, they are not to be daunted: "We carry on in the spirit of Nanette," you read time and again. The struggle for liberation of the majority of the Filipino people continues in all intensity and with all the risks involved. The love for their people, 90 percent of whom belong to the poor and most oppressed, and the memory of Nanette evidently leave them no other choice. "Here in her house in Butuan," writes Moring, one of her friends, "we have a poster hanging on the wall which says: 'Turn grief into courage until freedom is won'."

Two Major Roles

When Sister Nanette died she was fulfilling two key region-wide functions: she was the coordinator of the community-based health program (CBHP) in the provinces of East Mindanao. She also coordinated the work of the religious in East Mindanao who had joined the Rural Missionaries. She contributed actively in two major roles to the broad resistance movement: in the church sector and in the health sector. During the ten years Nanette worked in the Philippines, parallel developments in both sectors had taken place which put her on the path of the people's struggle.

The Hospital Experience

"Within religious life the search for other possibilities beyond frontiers must always be made. I think that personally I must opt for a life with the least endowed, who are without rights, in such a way that I myself shall have to be changed by it." Sister Antoinette made this statement in February, 1973, explaining her motive to leave for the Philippines and to no longer be available as a Board Member of her Congregation. In August of the same year she arrived on the sugar island of Negros where

her Congregation was running a hospital. Nanette had no medical training. She had been trained as a teacher, and during the period that she was a member of the Provincial Board of her Congregation (1970–1973), she trained to be a group facilitator. This training taught her a lot in the area of communication and organization, but also changed her attitude towards groups considerably. With this acquired knowledge and experience she started work in the New Escalante Magdalen Hospital in 1973. She was engaged in group dynamics, trying to stimulate the self-awareness of the staff. In spite of her best efforts, she did not succeed. The process of making people more aware failed miserably. Hospitals, including this hospital which was run by religious, turned out to be institutions with little possibility for movement. Making a group and the institution aware enough to change directions turned out to be an irreconcilable goal. For a hospital in the Philippines, she discovered, also has its share in exploitation and discrimination.

The U. S. Model

Public health care in the Philippines is patterned after the U. S. model. Doctors and nurses are trained to work in modern hospitals and clinics, with western medicines, and for patients who enjoy the possibility of leading a healthy life. The Philippine Medical Committee addressed this problem in a pamphlet on Philippine health significantly titled *The Hospital Doesn't Help You*. It said:

"It is no wonder that nearly half the qualified doctors have settled in the United States. Great American recruiting offices organize regular comparative examinations and recruit hundreds of nurses and doctors for hospitals and private practices in the United States. Philippine doctors and nurses are also much in demand in the Near East, often employed by multinational companies which have clinics of their own for their employees, but which are often also in the employ of American 'contractors' who run state hospitals in Saudi Arabia." In the Netherlands, too,

there are hospitals where Filipino nurses were employed when there was a dearth of local nurses. Filipino doctors working abroad in 1978 total 9,500, 68 percent of the total number of doctors in the Philippines. The pamphlet continues, "There are 114,000 qualified Filipino nurses; 57 percent of them work abroad, 30 percent in the urban centers of the Philippines, and only 12 percent in the countryside although as many as 70 percent of the population live there. (More recent information indicates that there are at least 90,000 Filipino nurses working overseas, out of 150,000 registered.) There are few doctors and nurses who are willing to work in the countryside. For most health professionals who themselves originate from the urban middle class, conditions of life in the countryside are severely shocking. They find that what they were taught in their training is far removed from the needs and possibilities of the rural population. A Filipino doctor is taught to use western medicines, and has a strong bias toward treating symptoms rather than for finding and preventing the causes of disease."

To Help the Poor

The Sisters of Julie Postel came to the Philippines in 1964 to help the poor in this northern district of Negros. Sister Marie de la Salle and Sister Mary Fidelis were the first, to be followed six months later by Sister Benigna. After three years of pioneer work and with the financial support of the co-financing organization Cebemo and the Congregation of the Sisters of Julie Postel, an 80 bed hospital was opened in 1967. It was first and foremost meant for the poor. Unfortunately that aim was never properly realized. Even before the arrival of Sister Nanette, a study had been made with the help of Dr. Villegas from Manila on how the Magdalen Hospital in New Escalante should function. Advice was given to frequently visit the barrios, the places where the poor live, because apparently the poor did not come to the hospital. They knew they could not afford.

With the staff, especially among the doctors, the interest for work outside the hospital was minimal or non-existent. The medical director, for instance, gave up after one trip to the barrios. Yet part of the staff and also the sisters and the Carmelite Fathers kept making fresh attempts. Nanette bravely joined these activities to find a way. Her motto was: If the poor do not come to the hospital, the hospital must go to the poor.

After three years of trying her best, she sensed that the necessary changes would not be made. The hospital still would not reach out to the poor, and the poor could not come to the hospital. Her deep and urgent call to be in the midst of and serve the poorest of the poor was not ignored. Her faith demanded that she make the painful separation from the Escalante mission community to look for other ways of living out her vocation.

With the Rural Missionaries: a Different Vision

Nanette discovered and joined the Rural Missionaries in 1976 to devote her life and skills to the kind of health care that is an instrument for liberation of the oppressed and undernourished people. She was assigned to the province of Lanao del Norte in southern Mindanao.

Her first few years in Mindanao bore the character of an experiment, a search for a new direction. In an account by the group of Dutch Carmelites whom she had joined by that time, we read about this stage of her development as follows: "In the 1970's institutions became the subject of discussion, among others, the institutions of government and church; schools and hospitals. Nearly all their programs were strongly questioned. At first this was felt as negative criticism, which had to be reacted against. But later on with the continuance of efforts toward change and strengthened by more thorough sociological analysis, the points of criticism proved to be increasingly helpful. In the light of criticisms, new understanding and new perspectives emerged. This was the case, among others, concerning programs dealing with cooperatives, family life and the health care system.

More stress began to be focused on the people and less on the institution. For many people this was a painful experience. Imagine how much time and resources we had spent on all those institutions! And then to discover that actually more time is spent in maintaining the institutions than in serving the people, for whom all of it was intended." A different vision began to develop.

Nanette was at the center of that process, and participated significantly in defining its direction. Indications of this are to be found in a record of this period where she lived with a group in Lanao del Norte's provincial capital of Iligan City. "A great change in the community of Iligan was caused first by the fact that Nanette joined the group and later on, John Lansing." Both brought their own experiences with them, both had their own purposes for coming to Iligan: Nanette wanted a deeper integration with rural people. John wanted, through integrating in the daily lives of the fisherfolk, to establish Basic Christian Communities. Through these contacts and their participation in the struggle of fishers, farmers and workers, and also through attending short courses and study meetings, both began to acquire a better view of the fundamental structure of Philippine society. Nanette wrote at this period: "Not until I got the opportunity to live in a barrio and to be integrated with the lives of the poor farmers, was I able to agree fully with the solutions proposed, including the view about armed resistance. I watched people die as a result of malnutrition, militarization, exploitation, etc., and realized that people have a right to defend themselves and to fight back with arms. The experiences in the barrios, change in lifestyle, and the whole environment have contributed to making me dedicate myself more and more for the well-being of the people. What further contributed to my development was the training and additional orientation and education programs with the Rural Missionaries, the evaluation and assessment of the community-based health program in three experimental districts and further, days of study and meetings with religious and other groups."

Farewell to Magdalen Hospital

Back in the province of Negros not much had changed at the hospital. With her new but solid experience of doing community health work in Mindanao, Nanette urged a systematic and thorough analysis of the hospital and the local health situation in Escalante. This was undertaken in 1977. The conclusion of the investigation was very painful; the study revealed that the hospital reached only 5 percent of the poor – for whom the hospital had been started. In spite of good intentions such as free consultation on Sundays, the hospital even proved to be a participant in exploitation and discrimination. It was exploiting because the expenses for poor patients were too high. If the poor were to be served in the hospital, they had to borrow money at extravagant interest rates; and that was at the cost of the lives of their families and relatives. It was discriminating because in practice the rich took advantage of the subsidized services which were intended for the poor.

The intention had been that by admitting the rich to the hospital, the support from their payments could make possible the care of the poor at low cost or even without charge. But it did not work in practice because the rich refused to pay their bill in full or ignored it altogether. The most wealthy large landowner of New Escalante, for instance, refused to pay a bill of P9,000.00.

“And then to discover that actually more time is spent in maintaining the institutions than in serving the people, for whom all of it was intended!”

Attempts to make the hospital self-supporting and also to open it up to “the outside world” (the barrios) proved futile in practice. Money from Europe had to be provided time and again (the total operating cost for the hospital from 1967 to 1980 has been

estimated at well over P5 million). Another attempt was made through economizing; the number of beds was reduced to 50. A group of 20 concerned staff members attempted once more to start some kind of primary health care including education and measures to prevent sickness. But it was of no avail. In 1980, the congregation decided to stop and to transfer the Magdalen Hospital to the Ministry of Health. On March 18, 1981 the official transfer took place in the presence of Philippine Health Minister Enrique Garcia.

Nanette had not worked in Negros since 1976. But because she was the only sister of the Julie Postel Congregation still in the Philippines, she was asked by her Provincial Superior, Sister Francisca te Stroete, to represent the congregation at the ceremonial transfer. Nanette discharged this rather difficult task in her own outspoken way. In her address at that occasion she stressed two major points: 1) the congregation's condition for the donation that the Government continue to employ the hospital staff, and 2) her negative assessment of the public health care system.

The congregation made as a condition for the donation that the Philippine Government would provide regular employment for at least 90 percent of the currently employed hospital staff. With only this one condition, the congregation was willing to donate everything – the land, the several buildings of the hospital, the equipment, and even the hospital supplies in current stock. The arrangement worked out was that half of the staff were to be retained at Magdalen Hospital and the others were to be employed in a nearby government health center which was to have a link-up with Magdalen Hospital. Promises of agreement had been made by the Deputy Minister Azurin but on the day of the transfer, Minister Enrique Garcia claimed to be ignorant about them. At least he said so. Not only Nanette but also the Hospital Director and the Chairman of the Board were flabbergasted and enraged. Nanette wrote about it to her co-sisters in the Netherlands: "After a few moments of suppressed anger, Crispin, Pieter and I spoke our minds and declared that this was the greatest possible insult to the donor. We insisted that we could only take

part in the transfer ceremonies if, in his address, Minister Garcia would give guarantee to the 31 staff members displaced from Magdalen that they would be employed in the nearby hospital. Finally he said that he could affirm the first part of the demand, (to assure employment), but could not say when it would be realized. After this promise had been made we went to the place of the ceremony." The Minister made his promise without mentioning a date for the assumption of service for the 31 persons. Later on, the staff members themselves staged a campaign and got the support of Nanette and others. In Nanette's own address during the ceremony, the concern for the unretained staff members was worded explicitly: "We hope that they will be the first to be employed when an opportunity offers itself." In the same letter she wrote, "personally I was deeply moved when one of those who heard he had not been accepted said, 'I turn back to poverty.' We must realize that he will again be one of the great majority, one of the 90 percent of the total population."

In the presence of the Health Minister, Nanete next criticized the health situation of the country in the following way: "We Sisters of the Julie Postel Congregation have in the last 13 years come to the conclusion that we, even with a very well equipped hospital which is now being transferred to you, have been able to reach only 5 percent of the people in this district who need basic health care very badly. You will therefore agree with me that the problem of health is not a simple medical or technical problem; for in that case a small addition to the national budget of P1.8 billion would be able to solve health problems. But because the health problem is only an outgrowth of a much deeper and fundamental root, namely the present social, economic, political and cultural confusion, we believe that only a fundamental approach to the situation can constitute the last word, and the final solution. To name this, it is an approach in which the people themselves can fully participate in such a way that it becomes at the same time a contribution towards the solution of other fundamental problems. Thus it will be a guarantee for liberation out of the present inhuman situation in which the people have lived for so many centuries."

By this time Nanette had personally experienced the liberating potential of an organized peoples' program. After five years, the community-based health work in Lanao del Norte had made so much headway that it could be entrusted to her co-workers. The Rural Missionaries recognized her leadership skills and requested that she transfer to Butuan to start CBHP work for the eastern Mindanao region.

At that time she wrote: "Today is the last day that I am in Lanao. Tomorrow I am going to move to Butuan Diocese which lies on the opposite side of the island of Mindanao. This week I nearly broke down when I handed the keys of 'our' house at Tubod to Wie-wie, my co-worker. I do not know at the moment where to find a home for myself. It is again quite a venture with a lot of uncertainty, but I know that Yahweh goes along with me and I trust that your prayers will accompany me."

In Butuan Nanette got thoroughly acquainted with her work very quickly. She had learned a lot in the preceding years. Neither was finding a 'home' a problem because she felt more and more involved and united with the poor population. She loved those people and was able to identify completely with their ideals and longing for a future of freedom and independence. In Butuan, she experienced an additional support through the presence of some former staff she had worked with in Magdalen Hospital in Negros. Among others, Moring was in Butuan. (Evelyn, also from Magdalen, had joined her in the Lanao program.) They belonged to the group of twenty former staff members in the hospital who were inspired by Nanette to serve in liberating models of health programs among the poor.

The Cure of Society

Wherever Nanette appeared, development seemed to gather speed. Here is one illustration. Nanette directed the CBHP in five provinces of East Mindanao. In the period from May, 1982 to May, 1983, this work under her coordinatorship expanded from 96 barrios to 132. At the same time the number of trained

volunteer community health workers increased from 262 to 565, more than double in just one year! This increase was limited to about half the geographic area. In the other half there was little progress; or organized community health work was made completely impossible because of the increasing militarization of those districts.

"We think," Nanette told John Brock, the editor of *Bijeen*, (Dutch publication), "that health care can contribute towards the solution of the real problems, because in disease and misery the problems show up so painfully. Health care must make the patients discover the causes of their diseases and so contribute to the self-awareness and liberation of the people. Good health care, as we see it, is never neutral but must share in bringing about change of society, must contribute toward creating a new society in which all people may enjoy the fruits of the earth and the achievements of our technical capabilities. And for that reason a cure of society is the first thing needed."

How Does the CBHP Work in Practice?

The community-based health program is not an ordinary health program. It must be based in the community, it must be of the barrio people themselves. Well said, but how does it work? Her letter of July 1983 to teachers from an elementary school at Boxmeer (Holland) explained: "CBHP is especially meant for the population in the rural areas (farmers, fisherfolk and tribal people). Because of the distance and especially because of poverty they cannot appeal to the existing health centers. In the Philippines this situation applies to 65 percent of the people. We work mostly through the structure of the church (diocese or parish) but in several places this is getting difficult because of suspicion and the negative attitude of some bishops." She related the seven stages in which the work is carried out:

- 1) If, having seen the bad health condition of the people, a priest or pastoral worker of a parish requests this approach, we ask them to summon the leaders of the barrios, mostly farmers or



Community health workers care for patients at a barrio clinic



Some of the more experienced volunteers are taught basic surgery techniques



Trained volunteer health workers are the only dentists available to the poor in the barrios

farmers' wives. You must realize that in a parish, besides the people who live in the center (poblacion) as in the village of Boxmeer, there are as many as 20 or 25 small villages beyond this center. We primarily want to engage people who have the openness to learn and to change. We also concentrate our activities on the villagers who are already more or less organized: that is to say, organized farmers, farmers' wives and youth. With these leaders we come together for a day or two. We help them to analyze the health situation in the Philippines, and help them to understand how the health system is closely related to the political, economic and cultural problems; e.g., what health care is provided, and who are served and profit from it. It is not so difficult to show the link between poverty and health, for the country teems with undernourished children and also adults. Moreover, half the children die before they are ten years of age. Next we study with them the pharmaceutical industry; how it works in the Philippines, its control by foreign enterprises which make a lot of money from it. Then we let them find out for themselves how health care in the Philippines ought to be seen. They provide the information themselves. Often we need only to add to, and to deepen the results of their shared knowledge, and in doing so they find out for themselves what the new form implies and requires. Next we come to the methods, concrete approaches, definition and roles of the community, the volunteer health workers and the nurse who will assist in the training.

2) Then these leaders are prepared to hand on to their people in the barrio all they have learned. Not until the community itself decides that they are interested and would like to start this program, does the pastoral worker with the help of the diocesan nurse and other CBHP staff members step in.

3) When people understand what it is all about, groupings of 15 to 20 families each elect somebody from their midst to be trained as a volunteer health worker. This may be anybody who has time and interest; one with common sense and naturally, who enjoys the confidence of the people.

4) After these people have been elected, training can begin. First an investigation into the health condition of the different barrios is carried out. The training takes three or four weeks spread over about a year. Training starts with a similar three-day orientation. Next various subjects are given: fundamental principles of health care, hygiene, prevention, the functioning of the human body, first aid, diagnoses of the most common diseases, family care, etc. In the case of actual medical treatment, the oriental practices are first of all discussed, such as use of medicinal herbs, acupuncture, acupressure and other forms of traditional treatment such as ventosa and moxibustion. In all this it is practice that matters. For instance, in the Philippines there are some 1,000 medicinal plants. The trick is where to find them, to distinguish which parts of the plant can be used: the root, the stalk, the leaves or the flower, and to learn how they should be prepared. They learn how to make medicine for diarrhea, cough, inflammation of the throat, and skin diseases. Massage and acupuncture can also be usefully applied. Not all diseases can be cured in this way. Against tuberculosis, for instance, there is no effective medicinal plant known here. So what matters is that a good balance between the oriental, traditional treatment and the western methods be established. There are many remedies which cost little or nothing. If a person, for instance, needs intravenous fluids because of dehydration, the juice of a young coconut will do.

5) The health workers who are being trained are expected to share the knowledge that they acquire with the group of families who are under their charge. In their turn these families assist the health workers; they provide them with travel allowance, if possible, and food to bring to training sessions. Food and travel cost is very often a problem. The people are as poor as church mice and things have become worse through the government's tactics of forced strategic hamlets and other forms of militarization, such as forced evacuation and land expropriation. Besides, we have lived through a terrible drought in the last six months. I can't understand how people manage to keep alive. We have only

just found out in the evaluation of our program that militarization has become number one in the list of causes of death; the military and the para-military murder more and more people. In the parish of San Francisco, 19 people died during Holy Week, killed directly or as a result of the state of war in which we constantly live here. Quite different from the situation in the Netherlands.

Activities are undertaken by families together with their volunteer health workers, such as the preparation of food, the making of medicine from plants, the laying out of a vegetable or herb garden. But the group is also urged to participate in activities for human rights and against militarization. All these happen in close cooperation with the peoples' organizations in the village.

6) The best and most active health workers may be trained as trainers. That means that they are going to cooperate in the training of other volunteer health workers. Some of them have already been appointed as coordinators of the health work in some parishes. These coordinators are given a special supplementary training in leadership, the transfer of knowledge, extensive first aid and acupuncture, tuberculosis control, dentistry, etc.

7) Regular follow-up of the health workers in the field is very important. Follow-up also takes place in our monthly meetings. When an account is given of the work, problems are discussed and additional information and training are provided. It is terrific to see how interested, active and proficient most of them are. Some are hardly able to read and write but I am convinced that many of them are more relevant than many a nurse in a hospital, who sits there with disagreeable spirit waiting for patients to come.

Risky Work

This is how Nanette described the community-based health program. Attempts are being made to build up the communities' own health care system, one which is not dependent on foreign support or western enterprise. Attempts are also made to revolutionize the public health care system of the Marcos adminis-

tration. The Marcos regime spends 75 percent of all available Department of Health funds and energy on the health of only 5 percent of the population, people who can pay for it. CBHP is concerned with those who are excluded from the health care services of the government, and enables people to establish among themselves their own health care system in which they have their own say. They themselves diagnose their problems, look for the solutions, and also carry them out. Thus the Filipino people are engaged in curing their sick society. They are engaged in liberating themselves from the evils of exploitation, oppression, and poverty.

Of course this is no simple affair. It is risky work: "Those in power," says Nanette, "consider it subversive and communistic. We are working in districts where there is a threat of revolt, where there are rebels. Regularly, therefore, our people are taken into custody because they are suspected of subversive activities, of providing medical treatment for guerillas or of people who, in the opinion of the military, shelter the rebels. In 1982, a doctor was murdered. Others are in prison. Rumors are increasingly stronger that the Marcos administration is going to keep an eye on the non-government health sector and the church sector because they are presumed to be instruments of the resistance movement."

What About the Church?

Another problem which Nanette and her co-workers had to tackle was that "some priests and pastoral workers think that community organization is not needed. With such attitudes the seed of the health workers does not fall into good soil. For them prayer is important, organization is not. Perhaps they think that there are solutions other than the struggle for liberation by the people themselves." Nanette had taken all possible pains to convince such priests and pastoral workers. She considered this effort part of her work and spent much time and attention on it. When she perished in the ferry boat disaster on November 21, 1983 she was on her way to Cebu for a meeting with other

religious and church workers from Mindanao, to reflect very thoroughly on the role of the church in the present situation of the Philippines. The meeting in Cebu did take place in spite of the fact that 11 out of 30 participants were not present at the start. Gradually during the days of the meeting it became clear that the group of 11 reported as missing would never join their meeting again.

What about the church? Nanette had understood her special call as early as 1976. At that time she found a group of sisters of different congregations who worked directly with rural poor to help them discover their dignity and rights, and to participate with them in building human communities based on justice as an experience and expression of their faith in Christ. This group, The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines was founded in 1969 with 19 sisters from 7 congregations. By the time Nanette became a member in 1976, the group had expanded to 76 members from 20 congregations. They were serving in 24 provinces.

She found a group of sisters of different congregations who worked directly with rural poor, to help them discover their dignity and rights.

The organization had grown in the course of the years, but things could be improved. The recruitment of new members needed more emphasis. The 1980 Cebu Congress added a new article to the statutes under the heading "Recruitment." The seven regional coordinators, one of whom was Sister Nanette, had the responsibility of recruiting activities added to their already many tasks. The coordinator's role already included six other major tasks. Nanette's task was, among others, to visit the sisters in her region. The regional coordinator had to frequently be absent for indefinite periods of time. She also had to see to it

that every three months a meeting would be held for all RMs in the region to reflect on their tasks and regional activities. Further, she was responsible for fund-raising for the programs in her region including the budget for administrative work. Finally she was the representative of the Rural Missionaries in her region at administrative board meetings as well as in regional meetings of other institutions and organizations.

As Soon as Possible

According to the RM statutes, a regional coordinator is elected for two years and may be re-elected only once. In December, 1982 Nanette began her second term. "I have accepted it," she wrote to her co-Sisters in Holland, "with the thought at the back of my mind that I shall try to pass on the job to another as soon as possible." She knew very well that she was much too occupied and could not take sufficient rest. But her enthusiasm and involvement often pushed her beyond the limits of what is ordinarily humanly possible. And not only herself. Her co-workers were similarly occupied almost day and night.

After she drowned, the work continued. From a letter to friends in the Netherlands after the new coordinator assumed her role, it appeared that the staff were encouraged to take more time for relaxation. "We shall try," Moring wrote, "but we can't promise it!"

"Her faith was concerned with the stark reality of everyday life. She earnestly wanted her faith to be able to change this inhuman reality."

"Where Life Is Most Downtrodden"

Annelies van Heijst

On October 23, 1982, the major superiors of the women religious in Holland celebrated the 25th anniversary of its existence. A great feast was prepared with hundreds of people invited. The theme of the SNVR Jubilee Year was "Justice and Peace." The whole celebration was planned around this theme. The culmination of the day was the testimony given by Sister Antoinette Berentsen. It was her personal story about being a religious in a country where the overwhelming majority of the population live in oppression and poverty. She addressed the big yet overcrowded hall. A slender woman in a purple dress told her story in a sensitive, determined way. A modest presentation, but at the same time inescapable. The audience was composed mostly of elderly, greying Dutch religious; she, a rather young woman, was not yet 50 years old.

Vows Renewed

She told about the Philippine situation. About the injustices perpetrated there incessantly, and in the midst of which she lives. She referred to the theme of the SNVR and asked: "What does justice and peace mean for the wife and children of the laborer

who, after he had been shot down, was thrown into the river? And to the farmer who sees his undernourished children with their bellies swollen like women in the ninth month of pregnancy?"

She related piercing experiences of suffering from her every day experience... so cruel and heart-rending that it gave you the shivers. But that kind of suffering is not the last word, Nanette told us; for the people in oppression are beginning to resist. They can no longer resign themselves to all that is inflicted on them, because in that case there would be no life left for them. Nanette then explained how she, as a Dutch woman, stood in this situation. She had made her choice, a choice for the poor, in favor of the liberation of the people who have so much suffering inflicted on them. And hence there follows an option against inhumanity, exploitation and oppression, against the powers which cause suffering and maintain it. Finally in her address she said: "I have recently renewed my vows at the funeral of Diego, a young pastoral worker, who two days before got seven bullets in his body in the dark of the evening, fired by two men dressed in green. Probably, against the liking of the military, he gave too much publicity about the massive hamlets in the parish. There was a crowd of about a thousand people at his funeral. The funeral was a manifestation of solidarity and protest. Standing near his dead body I prayed, crying in anger and sorrow on account of so much brutality: 'My God, I want to go to the very end with this suffering people, whatever may happen to me.'"

After these last words a leaden silence prevailed in the crowded hall. What questions would similar testimony suggest to you? How would you answer? What kind of a mirror is held up to you?

The tension gave way when the applause broke out. She went back to her seat. There was a break for tea. Quickly a collection was improvised which proved to be very successful. People were impressed. After five o'clock everybody left for home. And in a short time Nanette would again return to the Philippines, a little worried whether she would be permitted to enter the country after openly speaking so critically.

Questions

At home in the Netherlands convents the questions didn't go away. Why had Sister Nanette been invited to give an address at the silver jubilee of the SNVR? And how did she come to make the choice she told us about? How does anybody become like that and draw the ultimate conclusion towards such an option? What have the people who were there done because of her testimony? Did her appeal strike root and does it bear fruit? What more does she have to say to other Christians, even from beyond the boundaries of her death?

I shall try to answer these questions without pretending to be comprehensive. I am looking for answers starting from my own experiences with Nanette and from my understanding of her. In doing so, I shall try to do justice to the fuller reality and meaning of her life.

Bonds with the Major Superiors of Women Religious in Holland

For the SNVR there were more reasons than one to ask Nanette to come all the way from the Philippines to deliver an address on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of its foundation. Ever since the beginning of the seventies Nanette had strong bonds with the SNVR. At that time, as a member of her congregation's General Council, she attended the Training for Moderators, an intensive training course for religious in group dynamics work. This course was most relevant for the renewal which was prevailing at that time in the Post-Vatican II world of religious: The focus was on more attention for personal growth and mutual relationships in community.

When addressing the Jubilee audience, Nanette said she had learned in that course that "love alone is genuine, and consequently justice and peace become genuine when conflicts are fought out and resolved in struggle, doubt and patience." She added that based on her experience in the Philippines, "this

applies not only to a small group or a congregation, but also to the politics in a country that is divided by conflicts."

With her specialized training course completed, Nanette did not settle into the work of the religious world in the Netherlands as was more or less expected, but left for the Philippines. What happened? In the same period that she attended the training course she was also a member of the Board of her congregation. When at the start of 1973 a new Board had to be elected she said she would not be available for a second term. In a letter to her co-sisters she explains why. "Three years ago I gave in to the expectations of the sisters and accepted a function on the Board. The expectations of the sisters did not tally with my innermost longings. Yet I have been able to work wholeheartedly and have enjoyed it. When I now take a general view and place this within the church and the world, notably the Third World, then I believe that other things are asked of us than the things we have done so far. At least I am sure this is requested of me; I am well aware of it. I believe that personally I must opt for a life among the least endowed, who seem to have no rights."

That group (the least endowed) is what drew Nanette to the Philippines. This radical decision cost so much to her and also to the people who would have wanted her to stay in the Netherlands. But she believed that she must go. She knew how to convince others, and so she went.

Are You Willing to Come?

In the Philippines there were other sisters of her congregation. As member of the Board she had visited them in 1972, the year that martial law was proclaimed by the Marcos regime. Actually her decision to go to the Philippines had been developing for a long time. It started even before she was elected to the Board. She accepted the appeal which the Chapter made to her, to serve as a member of the Board. But according to her own words it did not tally with her deepest longings. When she went to visit the sisters in the Philippines and learned about their problems she offered

spontaneously, in a letter, to help them as much as she could. Next they asked if she, herself, would come to strengthen the group. She left behind the secure Netherlands surroundings, the people whom she loved. She set off without any idea what would be awaiting her. What she did know was that "things would not get easier, but more meaningful, surely," she shared later on. From very safe surroundings she went to a region where a state of siege had been proclaimed. From a relatively well-provided life she stepped into abject poverty. Perhaps the most important motive was that she wanted to follow Jesus in his option for the poor. "Looking for life where it is most downtrodden," as she expressed. In the Man of Nazareth she saw an example of a person who had acted similarly, radically, and without any reservation. When she spoke about it she also mentioned her family life which had played a role in her option. During the celebration of the 25th anniversary of her profession she made a speech. In it she said: "Father and Mother gave hands and feet to the Gospel. At home, we were able to make ends meet provided we worked hard and 'saved to the last penny.' At home there was an atmosphere of honesty, justice, coziness and space." There she had been taught what really matters in life. She disliked fuss and verbosity. She always spoke with great warmth about home, for there the seed of who she was to become had been planted.

"I believe that personally I must opt for a life among the least endowed, who seem to have no rights."

On August 19, 1973 the time came for Sister Antoinette to leave Holland for the Magdalen Hospital in New Escalante on the island of Negros.

Among the sisters assigned to the community there, several were employed in the hospital. One sister was working with the Carmelite Fathers as a faculty member of their Mt. Carmel College. The first thing she did was to familiarize herself with the

realities there. She did not engage in nursing or hospital administration immediately. She took stock of the surroundings, and established contact with the staff members of hospital and school, with the Carmelite Fathers, and with Filipino lay men and women. She took great pains to find her way, but she did not really succeed. More and more she discovered that the people who find their way to the hospital to be treated are only a small section of the population. There are so many other people who are ill or crippled, who live too far away from the hospital. Or so many who would benefit from simple medical assistance or better hygienic provisions. Even if the hospital had been founded with truly good intentions, it did not really answer her vocation: that is to say, to give first priority to helping people, especially the poorest of the poor.

She went on searching restlessly as long as she had not found the reason for which she had come to the Philippines; to be in the midst of the people who fared the worst. In that search, she learned to know the Dutch Carmelite Fathers in a new way. Of course, being a Dutch missionary to the Philippines, the Carmelites and Sisters of Julie Postel knew each other. In fact, they were living within the same church compound in New Escalante, and worked in each other's institutions there. Fr. Crispin was the director of their hospital, and Sister Benigna taught in the Carmelite Fathers' high school. Nanette had opportunities to meet Carmelites not only in Negros but in Mindanao. She began to know them in a new way, and through them began to find the vision and process of religious commitment her spirit had so long been seeking.

Eventually, when the other members of her congregation decided to return to Holland in 1979, Nanette was invited to participate closely in the faith-life and community of the Carmelites. Her congregation fully agreed with the ties that were developing between her and the Carmelites, especially later on when she was the only Dutch Sister of Julie Postel left in the Philippines. Even though she was physically separated, Nanette regularly wrote letters, reports, and asked critical questions to her

community abroad. Thus in 1976 she raised the question to the Provincial Chapter in the Netherlands whether their congregation was on the right track towards helping the Third World.

As for herself, she wrote that much had changed in her view about what at the moment would be the best kind of "help" you can offer a Third World country like the Philippines. "Where can I start best?" This question preoccupied Nanette intensely.

A Continuous Process

How did Nanette come to make the choice she actually made? In reality, it was a continuous process. It might be called a continuous conversion – conversion in the sense of being continually prepared to change, radically. From the Netherlands she moved to the Philippines. Once there she did not remain in one place, but went wherever she was called by what she felt as her mandate. Always on the way, living anywhere, yet nowhere having a fixed home was what she wanted, even though this was quite a tall order. She always kept herself open to the question: "Where can I dedicate myself best, where am I needed?" Perhaps the old-fashioned word "detachment" best fits this attitude. Detached from her personal things and fixed dwelling place; not attached; free.

To that question, "Where am I needed?" she subordinated her own personal preferences, often at great personal cost to herself. For Nanette had a richly developed personality, and she loved to socialize. You could count on having a good laugh with her. Although she formed deep personal relationships which were precious to her and to any who were blessed with participation in her life, she never allowed any human relationship to draw her away from the commitment she had made.

In a report sent to her Congregation in 1979 and in which she speaks extensively about her work, Nanette explained why she lived in that way. After a short sketch of the oppression which in the Philippines is the order of the day (3 percent of the population

are fabulously rich, 7 percent enjoy a decent living and the remaining 90 percent are too poor to meet their basic human needs), this reflection was added. It was authored by W. H. Scott, and featured in various church publications.

JESUS WEPT...

*It happened that Jesus left the boat
and set foot ashore in Mindanao
and He went across the mountain ridge of the B'laans
and the Manobos...
and He noticed how the multinational companies
deprived the cultural minorities of their land
And Jesus wept...*

*And He visited the slums in Cotabato
where the bulldozer levelled the poor dwellings
of Muslims and the Christians to the ground
and the military arrested thirteen people
who had the courage to resist
and for that reason were locked up in prison
And Jesus wept...*

*And he went into the office of the national grain
institute and all the other government offices
and He noticed how money passed under the table
and how the money-changers amassed
large sums of money
And Jesus wept...*

*And as He crossed the little canals
between the rice fields
He smelled the sweat of the tenants
who worked the land for the landowners
who meanwhile enjoyed life in the city
And Jesus wept...*

*And on seeing all that militarization,
the fugitives, land expropriation, prisons
martyrdom and deaths
injustice and exploitation
of the Filipino people
Jesus wept.*

*But above all when He noticed how his followers
passed their time in prayer
instead of recognizing God in their
actual dedication and love for their neighbors
Jesus wept bitterly.*

It is evident that Nanette did not send this text to the Netherlands as a follower of Jesus who only prayed and further closed her eyes to the miserable reality around her where people were so in need of solidarity. She wanted to share this story about Jesus as an indictment against all followers of Jesus, religious and lay people, who refuse to recognize God in service to their neighbors. Nanette placed herself close to the materially poor. In that way she practised charity. In that act of solidarity she saw the divine reflected. For her, just to pray was not sufficient. So much injustice occurs. Something must be done against it.

Running Risks

She herself words her faith like this:

"All my life Christ has been for me a source of inspiration. In the Scripture I read that Yahweh is the God of the poor. Christ is the very expression of it. He very clearly sided with the poor. He was born as a squatter, a slumdweller. He died naked on the cross and was buried in somebody else's tomb. All his life He identified himself with the poor. He denounced unjust structures in society which are the source of oppression and exploitation, and all these brought him to the cross."



"For me, prayer is above all a reflective attitude of life. It is the riverbed of everything about me, everything that strikes and touches me."

Whoever wants to follow this Jesus, whoever ventures to view life like this makes things difficult for themselves. For they run the risk of ending up like Him.

There is no possible doubt about what kind of people Nanette would opt for. They are the materially poor: the slumdweller, the hungry, the people who must work themselves into a sweat while others lead lives of luxury derived from the fruits of their labor. The materially poor had first claim on Nanette, and according to her sure conviction, they also had first claim on God and Jesus Christ. Such a note does not appeal to the churches in the Netherlands. We are used to reassuring ourselves by saying that

"All his life He identified himself with the poor. He denounced unjust structures in society which are the source of oppression and exploitation, and all these brought him to the cross."

our concern is also and mainly with the spiritually poor. Here in Holland faith is often restricted, narrowed, and made a strictly spiritual affair. But with Nanette things were different. Her faith was concerned with the stark reality of everyday life. She earnestly wanted her faith to be able to change this inhuman reality; with the help of her belief in a God who especially loves the materially poor, she desired to bring about liberation and redemption.

To that liberation she dedicated herself completely. She told us:

Being a missionary means for me being totally available for, and identifying myself with the materially poor. It means joining them in the struggle for liberation, for these people live in such inhuman conditions that things cannot continue as they are. We must do everything to bring about radical change of the unjust structures.

In this struggle for change, God is with us on the way, just as in the Old Testament God was with the Israelites. It will be the poor who, through their struggle, bring about redemption for the rich as well. The Israelites, by their exodus, prevented the Egyptians from continuing to be exploiters and slave-drivers.

From the Standpoint of the Poor

In speaking about her dedication and her faith, Nanette used words which do not sound so churchy: "struggle" and "radical change of structures" are not the words we usually hear from the pulpit on Sundays. Yet it is no purely Philippine affair to see the Bible in a new light, to discover the Bible's message of the materially poor, the people who have no rights and cannot speak, who are humiliated and exploited. In the Netherlands, too, there are groups of Christians who take the trouble to read the Bible from the standpoint of the materially poor, and who try to find out what consequences this entails for their belief and their faith actions.

Besides the Philippines there are other Third World countries where the poor are also resisting their miserable living circumstances. And out of these circumstances they are going to live their Christian faith anew. The God of the Exodus is a God who wants the liberation of people. Jesus Christ is the personification of God, a man who sided with the poor. With Him the disadvantaged take precedence. Latin American and Filipino people who themselves are poor and who go through life first and foremost as the people of God, consequently create new self-consciousness. Their courage is roused and they finally get a perspective for a better life, before death.

Understanding our Christian faith in this way is quite a revolution. For Nanette it was very important that at the time she had started work with the Rural Missionaries, she was able to participate in an "exposure" program. "Exposure" actually means "to lay oneself open to." It also means "to unmask." In practice,

it required that Nanette share life for some months with the peasant farmer population in the rural areas. She moved about in the smallest barrios, ate what the people ate, slept where they slept; and shared the daily life and the scanty food. At that time she actually found people telling her, "Sister, you lie down in that corner where there is no leak." And she saw how in a family where the children had swollen hungry bellies, the few eggs laid by the hen had to be sold. Money was too badly needed to allow the eggs to be given as food to the starving children. During that time Nanette personally experienced what it meant to be hungry; how it felt to be fed on turnips for weeks on end, and nothing else.

Being exposed to the desperate living conditions of the poor, experiences are gathered that change one's outlook. These experiences make us ask new questions. Questions such as: Why are the people really so poor when the Philippines is so rich in raw materials and the crops are so good? What are the deeper backgrounds of that poverty? Why are the people starving while in reality the country produces plenty of food for everybody? To these questions you get an answer only when you dare to look at the structures behind the facts of everyday life.

In May, 1983 Antoinette described how, with the help of things that happen around you, you can ask questions about structures: "Not a day passes without people being arrested, tortured or just disappearing from the scene. Numberless families must pack their goods and belongings in twenty minutes, and as they walk away and look back a few minutes later, their houses are ablaze. A few days after they flee, African palm oil plants cover the land, the work of an Anglo-Philippine company. The land expropriation is a terrible process in which people are literally deprived of their daily bread. And this is not the only exploitation. All of this is planned, supervised and realized through the U. S. Government, which provides more and more military help, training, and CIA assistance. I feel sad and angry at the same time because of so much injustice and violence being inflicted on the people. The experience does not leave you stone cold. More and more people's eyes are opened, not only because of what

happens in this place, but also by discovering that these situations are consequences of national and international relations. The people who are continually afflicted, and these are mostly the poor, also more and more organize resistance, which consequently costs more human lives. But... the people are not obliged to suffer unto death."

Militancy: No Time To Lose

From resignation to resistance. From submissiveness to readiness for struggle. In that process Antoinette found herself involved.

"My God, I want to go to the very end with this suffering people whatever may happen to me."

Not through reading books or studying principles of ideology, but through personal experience. She entered into a process that was full swing and which was becoming fiercer and fiercer. Out of the poor population itself arose resistance against their condition. People no longer accepted oppression as their fate, but learned to assert their rights for human dignity. However, investigating into the deeper causes of poverty is a dangerous thing to do, for there are groups of people who oppose this. They are often the people with power, money and arms. Investigating into the causes is not without risk, let alone attempting to change those causes. Of that risk and that danger Nanette was well aware. But even the danger to her own life did not weaken her commitment. It worked rather the other way about: at the funeral of Diego her decision was deepened – to stay with this suffering and struggling people.

Antoinette's good friend, Fr. Crispin Offermans, says about her, "If the liberation of the people was at stake, she was consistent and radical. There was something in her that many

have noticed: a sense of urgency – there was for her no time to lose. 'Others give their lives, how can we quietly wait for things to happen?' Nanette had said. Often her Dutch matter-of-factness collided with the more indirect Philippine style. Her western notion of time, and of being on time caused her quite a lot of inner annoyance. When she related with her co-RM Board Members in Manila she told them directly: 'I have come all the way from Mindanao and I don't know how we can fulfill all our urgent tasks. But you who are in Manila calmly arrive a few hours late!!!' But when she had to wait for an hour because a jeepney didn't yet have enough passengers, she would not complain. She knew that this involved the driver's livelihood."

Organizing as Basic

A basic purpose of the work of the Rural Missionaries health program is to actively support the process of liberation. It is not mere health care – applying band-aids and giving injections and the like – but care for the people in the totality of their existence. Making the population self-aware and supporting their effort to organize is needed if any change is to come about in their difficult situation. People will have to see more clearly for themselves where their misery comes from, what it is caused by, and how to bring change about. Concerning this, Nanette says in an interview published in a Dutch diocesan paper October 29, 1982: "In Philippine society one discovers more and more clearly that it is unmistakably a question of oppressors and oppressed, and that the contrasts cannot be reconciled by leaving the situation as it is.

"People more and more realize the necessity and the possibilities to throw off the yoke of oppression. But to accomplish that, it is essential that they should organize themselves into groups according to similar interests: farmers, workers, fisherfolk, youth, tribal minorities. Besides, it is essential that the organization of health care, or church community, should be directly related to the development of self-realization."

Good health care for all the people in the Philippines, therefore, depends on changes in the economic, political and cultural system. It does not suffice to be solely engaged in providing medicine and providing doctors and nurses. Prestige projects which are an imitation of western health care (such as the Philippine Heart Center Imelda Marcos ordered to be built) are by their very nature meant for a small privileged group.

When the Blows Fall

She was convinced that you need not necessarily go to the Philippines to participate in the process of liberation and renewal. But it was in the Philippines that Nanette learned what questions to ask. She told her friends, "I cannot say exactly how things ought to be managed in the Netherlands situation, because I have been away for too long a time. But anybody can ask: Where are the people who have no voice? Where is the oppression which denies people their rights? And also, what is my place in the movements that are carried out in society? What is my place in the changes which occur in the church? Read the harsh words which ring out from the Gospel with regard to the situation of the Netherlands, migrant workers in mind, or with the money and real estate speculators in mind. Or think of the people siding with profiteers.

"I am convinced that there is no future for the church if we are not able to step outside the velvety-soft consumption Christianity and to go and stand where the blows fall," she declared.

It is not claiming too much to say that the people who have heard and met Nanette were deeply impressed one way or the other. Not because she was pompous nor because she gave herself an air of importance. Perhaps more so because she was without pretensions, and was so ordinary. At the same time she became a mirror for you to look for your own image: How radically am I really following Christ? Where are the limits of my involvement? I have heard people say, in honest admiration of Antoinette: "A terrific woman! But one I would not be able to imitate..." Feelings

of impotence. And also feelings of annoyance. For the presence and appeal of Nanette was so authentic that you really could not escape from it.

"I am convinced that there is no future for the Church if we are not able to step outside the velvety-soft consumption Christianity and to go and stand where the blows fall."

Four Points

To women religious in the Netherlands who asked her how they themselves could participate in such a process as she had passed through, Nanette gave four points which may apply to others who are also willing to be open:

1) The beginning of all is restlessness; you may also call it "holy restlessness." The feeling that you are no longer able to remain seated on your chair, but that you must become active. You may allow your life to meet you as it presents itself to you; but you may also become active yourself and search for the place where you can go and take a stand.

2) When your restlessness has grown sufficiently and you are prepared to face something new, you will have to expose yourself to the situation of those who are at the bottom of society. You will find that you have a lot to learn from them, just at the moment when you think that you already know so well. It is not the intention that you should "mother" them, but you must stand beside them. Look in the same direction with them.

3) Next follows the stage of analyzing the backgrounds of the situation. Searching for the causes, for the "whys." Attempting to find out what systems and structures maintain the situation as it is. Trying to identify what powers are behind the situation.

4) Finally you will have to join a group of people who act and see in the same way as you do. Only in community with others can you contribute to a significant change in the situation. Only in community with others are you strong enough. You nourish each other with the ideal of an equitable society where everyone – no one excluded – can be fully human, where the power of money or arms does not reign supreme.

Ready-made prescriptions for the Dutch situation Nanette did not offer. If anything, it was her own situation that she kept emphasizing. From that close personal experience of oppression, of being humiliated, the work of liberation is born. In the light of that work of liberation many things became of secondary importance for Nanette, things which in the present situation we consider very important. All sorts of issues about the bishops in the church of the Netherlands, internal ecclesiastical questions about liturgical renewal and such like. For her, these ranged in second place. The primary question was: Is the church an instrument for liberation? If not, what is the best and fastest way for it to become so?

Politically, No Longer a Virgin

Viewing the church as an instrument of liberation implies at the same time that the church can no longer avoid political issues. A little mockingly, one day Nanette said about herself, using a comparison about one of the three religious vows, the vow of virginity: "In the past I was politically a virgin. But by engaging myself with the poor Filipinos and Filipinas, that is no longer possible. I must choose, and that implies inevitably, to choose in a political respect." For many of the faithful the relationship of faith and politics is seen as a difficulty. For Nanette, it issued spontaneously from her way of life, her faith, and her relationship with the people. She was convinced by experience, not by dogma; she was able to convince without forcing people. She is no longer with us to give testimony herself

of what moved and drove her on. But she left behind a very clear path. Thus, for instance in 1983, within the SNVR, a core group "Philippines" was founded.

*"You must stand beside them. Look in the same
direction with them."*

Nanette Berentsen was concerned not only with the people in the Philippines, but with people all over the world who are being oppressed, exploited and even murdered. She made it clear that it is necessary to concretize life and not just to have good intentions and use beautiful words. That is her lasting appeal to us, beyond the boundaries of the Philippines, even beyond the boundaries of death.



"There is no possible doubt about what kind of people Nanette would opt for. They are the materially poor: the slumdweller, the hungry, the people who must work themselves into a sweat while others lead lives of luxury derived from the fruits of their labor."

Of Importance: Not Only the Way You Go; Also the Tracks You Leave Behind

Tom Claessens

The death of Nanette Berentsen has left deep marks in the lives of a great many Filipinos with whom she was closely associated. The memorial services, letters and statements give testimony of this in an impressive way. The tragic manner in which she lost her life played a part, of course; but much more important was the life that she lived. As her friend I have often been surprised when I realized that Sister Nanette as a foreigner was able to integrate herself so completely in the struggle of the Filipino people for total human liberation.

Nanette herself knew how intensely related she was with the Filipino people in general and with many Filipinos personally. Through her person and her way of acting she has bound many people to herself in great friendship. For that reason the sorrow on her passing away is so great and intense among the people with whom she lived and worked. But as related by the many witnesses from the Philipines, it is not merely a question of human friendship that is dealt a painful blow by too early a death. The life of Nanette has, for those who experienced it from close association, a great witnessing strength.

In order to show this, her friends composed one of the memorial services for her and other church workers who perished on the theme: *The Word has become flesh and has lived among us*. In his homily at the service Msgr. Julio Labayen, the Bishop of Infanta, elaborated this as follows: "The Word, which was the basis of their dedication and their lives in the service of the poor, was not a word used merely in a phrase. It was continuous witness and a continuous event in their lives. What the effect was of this event we know, and that is the reason why we are here. They achieved faith, and it became reality for them, just as it is for us. We feel sadly about their loss, but we are very grateful to them, for allowing the Word to materialize in their lives. For thus they stand before us, very real and alive. And their lives will always be for us a guiding star on our way." Those who perished with her, who were included in this Eucharistic Memorial were: Rev. Ben Bunio, Sena Canabria, Sr. Mary Consuelo Chuidian, RGS, Sr. Mary Concepcion Conti, RGS, Sr. Amparo Gilbuena, MSM, Sr. Mary Virginia Gonzaga, RGS, Evelyn Hong, Inocencio "Boy" Ipong, Sr. Mary Catherine Loreto, RGS, Sr. Josephine Medrano, FMA, Fr. Simon Westendorp, O.Carm. and other lay church workers whose names we don't have.

Inspired by her example, her co-workers chose as their motto in 1984: "Turn grief into courage until freedom is won." If the meaning of the life and activity of Nanette is overpowering for those who knew her so intimately, then it is meaningful that we, who know her from hearsay only, should also reflect on the question: what does she tell us? what path does she leave for us? For that purpose I want to help her light to shine on a number of themes that we in the Netherlands missionary world are struggling with.

Option for the Poor

The Dutch Missionary Council and the organizations which take part in it have chosen as a starting point for this and the next few years, *the option for the poor*, and for this year particularly:

listening to the poor. Time and again it turns out that so simple a starting point at first glance occasions enormous discussions. Who do you really mean when speaking about the poor? Are they the unknown starving masses in Africa we are confronted with on TV? The victims of violence in El Salvador or in Lebanon? The fugitives from Afghanistan, Vietnam or Guatemala? Or are they the truly marginated persons in our country that the politicians are squabbling about? Or do we understand this to mean the "spiritually poor"? Apparently all have their own idea about it, dependent on their own sphere of action and their own position in society. What does this option imply? Does it mean only some show of preference? Or does it mean opting for these and excluding all the others? And does that option not require an adjustment of one's own lifestyle? Can that option possibly be made from an intact, comfortable social position?

"As a religious I have made a clear option to side with the poor in an active and systematic way. This has also given my religious life a political dimension."

For many people in the missionary world these are not merely interesting questions for discussion, but questions for life decisions that touch them deeply. For Nanette Berentsen the option for the poor was lived out in her flesh and blood. It is the option which defined and directed her life. She found the poor in the oppressed and exploited people of the Philippines with whom she lived. From the moment that she got acquainted with these people she dedicated herself to them, heart and soul. That was the achievement of her religious life, as she worded it in the renewal of her vows at the grave of the murdered pastoral worker: "My God I want to go to the very end with this suffering people, whatever may happen to me." It is clear, especially from the

testimonies of her Filipino co-workers, how that option resulted in great respect for and love of the people whom she met. It is striking how, on the one hand, she is described as a person who has completely remained herself, real Dutch – spontaneous, reacting or confronting directly; but on the other hand identifying herself altogether with the Filipinos.

“Nanette had a great respect for both life and people. Her life and her testimony as a religious and her dedication to the Filipino people as a Rural Missionary have shown that differences in race and color are no hindrance to participating in the struggle of the people. For she loved the Filipino people” was a typical testimony.



“Only in community with others are you strong enough. You nourish each other with the ideal of an equitable society where everyone can be fully human...”

Many Filipinos, because of generations of oppression and exploitation, often have little esteem for themselves. For people such as these it was immensely important to be able to meet a person who respected them completely, genuinely. A person who did not command or domineer, but who would listen to them and encourage them to take charge of their own future and present. "As far as we are concerned, we, Nanette's co-workers in the health care program, have found her to be a good companion in our work. She taught us not to be dependent. We learned a lot from the way she supervised our work and taught each of us to be responsible. We learned how to overcome our weaknesses; and in our struggle, how not to act out of fear, but with faith."

"As a foreigner, she did not show any superiority being a religious when she worked with us Filipinos." Thus wrote another of her close co-workers. And she adds how Nanette was sensitive to and took time for everybody's personal problems. She was always ready to listen. Many of her Dutch colleagues in the Philippines had the same experience, as did many other people in the Netherlands. Numerous are the letters which she managed to write in the midst of all her activities. But towards her Dutch colleagues and her co-religious she was sometimes far less accomodating. With her peers, she could be critical and challenging. She often went to conferences for religious to voice her critical appeal. Nanette's priorities were clear to her, and urgent. She "wore her heart on her sleeve"; she said what she believed.

Struck deeply by "the cry of the poor" she did not keep silent about it, but challenged others, especially her co-religious, to a similar option for the poor – an option for the poor based on respectful and loving listening which, as any real conversion, renews life completely. In the numerous letters which she wrote to her relatives, her Congregation, and her friends in the Netherlands she not only testifies to her option, but summons them to embrace that same Gospel call. For us it is important, in realizing the option for the poor, to let ourselves be led by the concrete example of missionaries like Sister Nanette Berentsen.

The Unavoidable Political Dimension

People in the Philippines are not poor because the land cannot produce sufficiently to nourish all mouths; they are poor because they are continually being struck by catastrophes. They are not poor because they are stupid and lazy as some would allege. People in the Philippines are poor because they are kept poor; because the powerful refuse to share wealth and resources in a fair way. People are poor because they are considered not fully human and are treated as such by those in power. With unimaginable brutal violence and widespread corruption, the powerful on all levels from high to low maintain their position and their wealth at the cost of exploiting, repressing and oppressing the overwhelming majority of the population. It is clear that poverty in the Philippines is also a political problem.

Nanette wrote about this, too: "As a religious I have made a clear option to side with the poor in an active and systematic way. This has also given my religious life a clear political dimension. I feel that I can serve the Filipino people best by integrating myself completely in the struggle for freedom, even if it implies risks. For me this means putting the Gospel into practice, and I find a strong inspiration in co-workers and friends who risk everything for it, even their liberty and their lives."

For many people in the First World and even in the Philippines who sympathize with mission and church, they find it difficult to accept that missionary work assumes this political dimension. They think that the church must confine itself to three fields: the preaching of the Gospel, pastoral care, and charitable help. If the church limits itself to these fields only, it may be a church *for* the poor, but intentionally or not, this approach to ministry will perpetuate the situation of the poor. Thus will the church be an accomplice in perpetuating the situation of the poor. This occurs far too often, even in the Philippines.

In discussions with co-workers and friends, Nanette persistently tried to come to a deeper understanding of the social and political relationships which occasion so much injustice and poverty. She was not only moved by deep pity for the victims of injustices, but was also continually preoccupied with the ques-



She would ask, "What is my place in the movements that are carried out in society? What is my place in the changes which occur in the church?"

tion of "how" and "why." An example of this is shared by one of her co-workers who said, "You would not call her emotional or sentimental, but after a liturgical celebration during our last meeting of the Rural Missionaries we saw Nanette crying; really sobbing in a corner. All of us were surprised, felt sorry for her, and were aghast. When we asked her why she was crying she confided to us: 'I was thinking of all those innocent people who are being murdered, tortured and destroyed by the current militarization, and how in the First World we are guilty of complicity.'"

The understanding Nanette gained brought her to the point of identifying herself with the people. "As I look back from my present standpoint, I must say that I have lost all my earlier ideals. The only ground under my feet now is the harsh reality of the lives of the people who struggle for their survival." This was where Nanette's conversion to the poor brought her. And thus

she gave shape to and helped to build a church of the poor. She was aware of this and wrote home about it: "There is a new community arising here from the base, from below; and I believe that I have a place in it, though a modest one. Together with others we try to give the Gospel a tangible shape so that the Word of God is made flesh again in the midst of the reality in which we live."

In the life of Nanette and of many others in the Philippines and elsewhere, an enormous challenge lies before us. Not a theoretical discussion of whether or not the church may be involved in politics, and if so, under what conditions. Nanette engaged in a dialogue of life which led her to become one with the Church of the Poor. This is the challenge in our own lives, and in our communal efforts of being church. We will be converted not just by judging the social and political relationships from our own well-understood interests, but by seeing and acting from the perspective of the needs and rights of the poor.

"There is a new community arising here from the base, from below; and I believe that I have a place in it, though a modest one. Together with others we try to give the Gospel a tangible shape so that the Word of God is made flesh again in the midst of the reality in which we live."

Justice and Peace

It would be difficult if not impossible to understand Nanette's life and the option she made if we do not fully realize the situation in which she lived, a situation that was saturated with inhuman violence and injustice. This was and remains the

situation in most parts of the Philippines, and was the situation in which she grew toward her conversion. Shortly before her death she sent to friends a report that she and some co-workers compiled concerning a number of recent documented cases of injustices and violence in Mindanao. They intended to make this sort of report regularly. She asked her friends in the Netherlands to give publicity to these matters. In this report, among others, the following summary is to be found: The year was 1983.

Tandag, Agusan del Sur (Jan.–June)	4 deaths	1 missing
Butuan, Agusan del Norte (Jan.–June)	17 deaths	5 missing
San Francisco, Agusan (Jan.–June)	35 deaths	4 missing
Pagadian, Zamboanga Sur (Mar.–Sept.)	17 deaths	1 missing
Cotabato City (Jan.–Sept.)	52 deaths	?
Ozamis City (July–Sept.)	30 deaths	6 missing

(It is reported that on October 10, five people were murdered at the same time, but this has not yet been confirmed.)

Iligan (Feb.–Aug.)	11 deaths	?
--------------------	-----------	---

(A number of recent murders are still being investigated.)

In all these cases there is proof or strong indication that the military or para-military were involved in the murders. It is certain that the victims were unarmed, that these were not armed encounters between the army and the revolutionary forces.

In a letter to friends at her congregation's center in Boxmeer, Nanette wrote on October 30, 1983: "This month another peasant pastoral worker was shot to death in his house in the presence of his wife and children, the youngest being only one month old. The funeral was a protest march with about 3,000 people taking part in it. Even during the service the military could not refrain from causing commotion. Another agriculturist was found dead in the river, hands and feet tied, his tongue cut off; and many more atrocities."

In the last few years Nanette had continually been confronted with these kinds of horrible cruelties inflicted on persons who in the name of the people protested against injustice, or in some way worked for justice.

In this situation, the question of necessity and morality of resistance included armed defense. Resistance no longer remained theoretical. Throughout the Philippines people have organized themselves for resistance. The organization includes movements, some members of which are armed and who see themselves as defending the life and rights of the poor.

As in many other countries, the "official" (hierarchical and traditional institutional) church in the Philippines is greatly disturbed about this development, especially when church members themselves make this option. They cannot accept as morally right this form of resistance to a legal government. Yet the church as it lives among the organized poor and experiences their daily dying and struggle for life..., the church as it is being given shape by Nanette, Simon and others all over the struggling world, has a different perception. "Whether you are young or old, the renewal of religious life does not start with discussions about

"Whether you are young or old, the renewal of religious life does not start with discussions about justice and peace, but it begins where we dare to take a stand in the real conflicts of society."

justice and peace, but it begins where we dare to take a stand in the real conflicts of society," Nanette explained. With the experience they gained, the question could be more responsibly faced. Although not personally involved in the armed component of the resistance movement, she explained the people's decision for armed resistance. For many, she said, the time of submissiveness had passed.

Through the work of people like Nanette and her co-workers in the struggle for total human liberation, others grow in confidence and courage, and learn to become responsible for their own decisions. With their new-found freedom and capacity to work

together for their own legitimate needs, such people become a threat to those with selfish vested interests. And consequently they who do not take up arms themselves are also threatened with death by the military and goons who are protecting the "status quo."

So much were their lives in danger by the military that after the ferry boat disaster, many people expressed that for Nanette and the other church workers who lost their lives in the *Cassandra*, death by the military's direct violence would have been so much more fitting. What they meant was, they deserved the status of martyrs. Yet even their death in the *Cassandra* sinking was a martyrdom. Their death on that ship was very much related to the ills of the society which they had pledged to serve. Whether it be a second or third rate transportation service, a company that is out only to make profit regardless of the cost to human life, or the military violence of a bureaucrat capitalist system, they are just part and parcel of the same evil system that claims its victims in so many different forms day after day. Once you pledge solidarity with these victims in their struggle for liberation, you are in danger of becoming a victim yourself.

In the Philippines, the collusion of a thin upper stratum of the population with the military and political interests of the "Free World" has for generations played an important role. The Philippines is the U.S.A.'s most important military stronghold in Asia. For this reason the U. S. keeps supporting the present powers-that-be in the Philippines. This support enables the powers-that-be to militarize society on an unheard of scale. The militarization, intimidation and the violence which proceed from the Philippine military are the bases on which the position of the powerful rests. The struggle which Nanette Berentsen has undertaken together with the oppressed and exploited people challenges us to investigate and fight any form of militarization, any unjust power based on armed violence.

To Testify and To Liberate

Survivors of the disaster of the Doña Cassandra relate how they saw the religious distributing lifebelts to children even up to the time the ship sank. And how finally they knelt down in prayer waiting for the end. In his homily at the memorial service Bishop Labayen said: "They could have chosen to abandon ship before the other passengers, but they gave precedence to the safety of the other passengers. Obedience to the call of the poor forced them to the unselfish final sacrifice of their lives." And a little further on: "As a person lives, so that person dies. I do not think that much reflection was done by the Sisters and lay workers who perished with them. Drawing from the sources of their second nature, they lived dedicated to the poor; and when they heard the call of the poor there was no need for them to reflect. Here was their involvement and this was the ultimate – and last test. And they stood the test."

As a missionary Nanette had been sent out to live the Gospel in the midst of, and with the Filipino people. That was her mission. Every missionary will realize his or her mission in his or her own way, depending on the situation in which they live. Nanette made her choice and lived up to it in all its radicalism. Because of this the value of her life and death has risen above human measure as her co-workers and friends testify: "We have all been witnesses of the self-sacrificing life of Sister Nanette and we have received its fruits. We also know, from proximity, her honesty and dedication to our health program and for the Filipino people. She joined us fully in the struggle to free the people from structures which at the moment oppress all of us."

"Therefore we want to express our gratitude for all these memories and particularly, because we have been permitted to be witnesses of the life of Sister Nanette. We know that time will heal the pain of the loss for all of us, but what will remain are the memories: how she loved and cared, how she taught us, how she listened, counselled and prayed, how she was always prepared for each of us, how she sacrificed her life."

In the struggle of the Filipino people Nanette lived her mission; and by solidarity she testified to the message. In doing so, she may give us a different picture of a missionary from what we expect or are used to. Perhaps one or the other will inquire into the religious dimension of this life. Nanette writes about this herself: "On the one hand I experience how the poor consider God as the God of Liberation, who is on the way with them to a new creation. On the other hand it becomes more and more evident how God and religion are being abused by the capitalists. This made me reflect and ask myself: "What or Who is God in my life? I think I can honestly say that my involvement in the struggle for liberation has not caused me to give up my faith but on the contrary, has purified it. Little by little, after much struggling, uncertainty and reflection I have come to a point in

"What or Who is God in my life? I think I can honestly say that my involvement in the struggle for liberation has not caused me to give up my faith but on the contrary, has purified it."

my faith where I can allow God the freedom to be or not to be. God need not be there because it is my need for my security. This has given me space, beneficial for myself, and apparently for others also. In this struggle and growth I can help other believers not to shirk questions and problems, and not to push them aside either."

How many of us can dare to voice such insights? Such an authentic faith, which has grown through doubt and uncertainty, puts a relative value on many of our church practices. She wrote further: "For me prayer is above all a reflective attitude of life. It is the river bed of everything about me, everything that strikes and touches me. Praying in formulas is not so important for me, for all my life is placed against the background of a creation on

the way to fulfillment through a gigantic struggle of the oppressed who throw off the yoke of their exploitation, and in this way contribute to the liberation of their oppressors. I do not feel the need of endlessly repeating the prayers of others, but I do not make a point of this either. More important for me is to listen to the call of the poor and to stand close by them and to join them in their call for liberation from their exile. I do not feel at home any longer in Eucharistic celebrations where oppressors and exploiters are present. I find inspiration and can heartily join in a celebration of the poor who are able to celebrate a little piece of liberation or give expression to their sufferings, hopes and expectations."

Msgr. Bluysen, Director of the Netherlands annual mission support project, one day called missionaries "the scouts of a new promised land." Not primarily messengers who carry our message abroad, but scouts who gain new experiences elsewhere and let us share in them. That the life of Nanette in the Philippines will leave its traces behind is guaranteed by her co-workers. Whether it will leave a trace in our missionary call will depend on the openness that we permit for her experience to affect us.

Simon, Another Missionary Martyr

The priest among the victims of the ferry boat disaster was the Carmelite Simon (John) Westendorp from Haaksbergen, the Netherlands. He drowned two days after his 47th birthday. For 22 years, his whole priestly life, he worked as a missionary in the Philippines. His parents were simple, genuine Christians of deep faith. His Father was a man of great sensitivity regarding justice, a trait re-lived in Simon. Of the 10 children of their family, two became Carmelite priests, and one became a Carmelite nun.

Simon's first assignment was to New Escalante, Negros Occidental in the year 1964. As assistant parish priest in the Mount Carmel Parish there, he engaged in traditional parish activities, but also became involved in the newly established credit union cooperative movement. Later he served as rector of the Carmelite Minor Seminary in New Escalante. In 1976, at his own request, he was transferred to Agusan del Sur, where he became parish priest of a "frontier" underdeveloped town called San Francisco. Simon was prior of the Carmelite community in San Francisco during most of his time in Agusan. He also served on the Council of the Philippine group of Carmelites.

What kind of a man was Simon? What were his feelings, principles, values? He was quiet, but clear. Reflective, yet active. He, too, kept himself open to being taught by the people and by history. He kept searching for the "what" and "how" of being priest, being church at this time in the Philippines.

In 1983 the Dutch Province of Carmelites of which he was a member made an Orientation Paper which states:

Carmelite pastors find themselves within a movement which at its origin showed a critical function with regard to church and society. Today, in the year 1983, their pastoral activity provides them with a challenge to translate their fundamental opposition against injustice and brokenness into an option for the poor of our time.

Challenged by the present needs, carried by the inspiring power of Scripture and Rule, Carmel wants to be an answer in word and deed....

When Simon was asked his feelings and expectations about the near future in the Philippine context, he gave this response: "Our feelings and expectations regarding the near future are closely linked with the people's struggle for liberation. Regarding religious life, we see no future unless we religious can integrate ourselves in the struggle of laborers and farmers for liberation. It should become ever clearer that this is a question of faith. This should be basic to our spirituality." He answered for the Philippine Carmelites, of which he was the prior.

Since 1970 Simon had devoted himself to the rights of the barrio people who were in danger of becoming the victims of land expropriation in favor of the Guthrie palm oil project. He made it clear what standpoint the parish had taken: opting for the small farmers. With some co-workers Simon recorded the complaints of these people. A brother Carmelite says about him: "He was a very modest person, and was not a talkative man; but when he had something to say it was a sensible thing to listen to him." At the memorial service in his native place of Hengevelde, his brother who is also a Carmelite said: "I hear members of the family say: If anything worries you, go to John (Simon); you can count on him. He is thoughtful and has wise things to say."

When Simon started his work in San Francisco, Agusan del Sur, he went to live in a slum area of the badly neglected town of Prosperidad, about 14 kilometers north of San Francisco. His

struggle for the right of the outcasts and his way of life deeply influenced the way he looked on things. One of the consequences for him was that he resolved to travel as the poor travel: by boat. He had gone to the Netherlands for heart surgery and spent a rather long recuperation in his home country. In September of 1983, he took the risk of returning to San Francisco with his "new" heart, because he knew his parish was in the midst of terror

"Regarding religious life, we see no future unless we religious can integrate ourselves in the struggle of laborers and farmers for liberation. It should become ever clearer that this is a question of faith."

and military violence. He saw travelling by plane as a privilege of the well-to-do.

His own words sum up his life: "We should not be active *for*, or in the name of, ordinary people; but *with* them, as one of them. Then our life begins to look quite different." The option of Simon was no less radical than Antoinette's. We claim him, too, as a missionary martyr.

After Seven Years: the Philippines in the Nineties

Mary Grenough

The Philippines, an archipelago of about 7,000 islands, lies in the southeastern part of the Pacific Ocean between eastern Indonesia and southern China. The most populated islands are Luzon, with its capital in Manila, Mindoro, Masbate, Leyte, Samar, Panay, Negros, Palawan, Cebu, Bohol and Mindanao. The islands have a land surface of about 300,000 square kilometers (7 times the size of the entire Netherlands and about the same size as the State of Nevada in the U. S.). The islands are spread over an area of 800,000 square kilometers extending 1,760 kilometers or 1,100 miles from south to north.

The 1990 census listed a population of 60.5 million. In 1975 the count was 42 million. Due to the high birth rate, a total population of 70 to 80 million is expected by the year 2000.

Some 4 million indigenous peoples live in remote mountain areas; they are probably the original inhabitants of the islands. They include 49 distinct ethno-linguistic groups. In addition to these peoples, there are about 2.5 million Muslims who belong to 14 different ethno-linguistic groups. Muslims migrated to the Philippines about 600 years ago. The vast majority of Filipinos are of Malayan descent. Another significant group would be those of Chinese origin who presently number slightly less than 1 million. Eleven major languages and hundreds of dialects are spoken throughout the country.

More than 80 percent of the total population are Catholic by baptism.

In February 1986, following almost 20 years of debilitating dictatorial rule by Ferdinand Marcos, Corazon Aquino was installed as President in the culminating event of what the world now calls "People Power." Television brought the spectacle of the over one million unarmed ordinary citizens of different social classes and sectors confronting military tanks and guns in united, firm and prayerful refusal to accept continued repression. The aspirations for freedom of peoples throughout the world were sparked.

The years under Marcos' Martial Law were called "constitutional authoritarianism." Corazon Aquino promised constitutional democracy. Hopes were high, even euphoric, in Manila and outside the country.

By late 1986, a ceasefire was in place and terms for peace were being discussed. In January 1987 the new Constitution was ratified by 80 percent of voters. Early in her campaign, Cory had identified the country's root problems as social and economic inequalities, and traced the insurgency to these. By the end of 1990 the Philippines has become less rather than more stable, more economically depressed and ecologically devastated, and more militarized. Major indicators of this will be noted.

Economic Indicators

When Aquino assumed leadership, she inherited a crippled economy burdened with a foreign debt of \$24.6 billion. By the end of 1989, official government records indicated that the foreign debt had increased to \$27.6 billion. Citizen "debt watchers" claim that the debt is likely to reach \$30 billion by the end of 1990. In 1988, 45.3 percent of the national budget went to service the debt while a meager 3.2 percent was allocated for health, and 3.5 percent of the total budget given to other social services: this in a country whose majority cannot afford their own basic needs. The economy is now geared toward export crops and products.

There was a trade deficit of \$1.085 billion in 1988 and \$2.598 billion in 1989. The deficit is predicted to reach \$3 billion by the end of 1990.

The country's dependence on foreign funds has required the government to adopt economic policies that work to the detriment of its citizens. Even more disastrous than the prevailing policies of low wage levels and import liberalization is the fact that the ever-expanding exports are destroying the very life-system of the country. Irreplaceable natural resources such as forests, coral reefs, mangrove swamps, rivers and ocean beds are being wantonly destroyed. GNP figures do not indicate the massive losses sustained, but the effects are being experienced disproportionately by the fisherfolk and farmers whose fish and crop yields fall as their lands and fishing grounds deteriorate and disappear.

Agrarian Reform in its Absence

Of the Philippines' total agrarian labor force of 10 million, only 1.5 million are owner-cultivators. Eighty percent of the land is owned by only 20 percent of landowners. The new comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law was signed into law on June 10, 1988 in spite of widespread opposition from almost all the country's organized small landowners and peasant farmers.

As the second year of the law's implementation drew to a close in June 1990, the government had very little to show in its program of transforming land ownership. Only 2 percent of the approximately 4 million hectares of private agricultural lands covered by the program had actually been acquired and distributed. And only P400 million (7.4 percent) of its P2.7 billion budget appropriated for 1987 to 1989 had been spent by the Department of Agrarian Reform for land acquisition and distribution.¹ Blatant cases of anomalous deals repeatedly discredit the government

¹ *Manila Chronicle*, June 10, 1990, pages 1 and 5 in "CARP: Too Little accomplished After Two Years," by Redempto Ando.

program. Peasant leaders who continue to struggle for their constitutional rights are being arrested, tortured and killed. The internationally known and respected leader of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP, the National Farmers Movement) was recently illegally arrested and is presently serving a 4–18 year sentence among common criminals in the National Penitentiary on false charges.

The Health Picture

The country is sick. Its people are suffering and dying of largely preventable diseases. Most die with little or no health services or care. A study commissioned by the Asian Development Bank included the following information.²

Health Expenditures and Financing (1985)

Total Health Expenditures: \$762.9 million (2.4% of GNP)

Private Health Expenditures: 564.0 million (74% of total)

Government Health Expenditures:

Department of Health 130.9 million (17% of total)

Other Gov't Sources 68.0 million (9% of total)

Drug industry sales accounted for 46.5 percent of total health expenditures and amounted to \$355 million for the year 1985.³ Multinational companies control 75 percent of the sales of pharmaceuticals in the Philippines. Another 20 percent is controlled by the United Drug Company, a group owned by a Marcos associate. The remaining 5 percent of sales are divided among about 200 small Filipino firms.⁴

The problems associated with becoming sick in the Philippines cannot be imagined by persons who take it for granted that basic

² Intercare Study – commissioned by the Asian Development Bank and released in 1987.

³ Health Action Information Network, 9 Cabanatuan St., PhilAm Homes, Quezon City, Philippines.

⁴ Securities and Exchange Commission, Philippines.

health services are covered by one's employer, insurance or government social benefits. The above-mentioned 1985 Asian Development Bank study included the financial implications for various levels of health services. Presuming one has employment (and less than 50 percent have regular employment), the equivalent days of income needed to pay for services is given. Costs would be higher now, and wages relatively lower, based on real income.

<i>Health Service Needed</i>	<i>Days of work Needed to Pay (based on average income)</i>
One consultation with a General Practitioner M.D.	1.1 day
One consultation with a Specialist M.D.	3.2 days
One chest x-ray	3.3 days
3 days room and board in a public hospital ward	7.2 days
3 days room and board in a private room	17.2 days
Simple tonsillectomy	94.2 days
Simple appendectomy	99.9 days

In a country so weakened by poverty and sickness, the government's 1990 national budget allocated P23 billion for defense and only P7.02 billion for health.

Human Rights Record in the Constitutional Democracy Years of Aquino

In 1986, Cory Aquino declared the promotion of human rights as one of the cornerstones of her administration, claiming this would set it apart from the Marcos government. Perhaps the most glaring indicator of increasing militarization is the widespread pattern of forced evacuation and voluntary fleeing from villages. Since February 1986, the number of persons displaced by war has reached 909,000 (documented instances). Evacuees suffer loss of crops, livestock, homes and home furnishings when they flee or are

forced to leave because of military operations. In no instance have the government or civilian groups been able to provide even a modicum of shelter, food, and sanitation for the evacuees. An example of the toll on the villagers is that when 35,000 people living in mountain villages of Negros were forced by the military to evacuate, 315 Negrense children died from hunger and disease during the two-month period of May and June 1989.

During Aquino's first 3 years, some 800 persons were either killed or maimed in 329 incidents of massacres. During the same period, 140 others were murdered and 199 abducted for political reasons and never seen again. Denied due process of the law, 14,207 persons were arrested and held without legal basis and warrants; among them, 2,401 suffered varying forms and degrees of torture.⁵

Despite Cory Aquino's stress on her deep Christian faith and practice, her government is focusing more on churchpeople than the Marcos government did, in what they claim to be a counter-insurgency campaign. In 1988, the number of reported cases of church-related victims of human rights violations was 177, and in 1989 the total was 169; both years were higher than any year under Marcos.⁶

The Human Rights Violations Graph and Figures give an overall view of who is being targeted in the present period.⁷

⁵ Justice and Peace Review, vol. 4. No. 3 and 4, 1990, ISSN 2116-6360, page 4. Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace, Rm. 502 Estuar Bldg. 41 Timog Avenue, Quezon City, Philippines.

⁶ "The Churches and Human Rights. A Tower of Babel in a Worsening Situation," Church Trends 1988-1990, No. 1. Church Data Center, 150 K-6th Street, Kamias, Quezon City, Philippines, page 24.

⁷ "Human Rights Violations Against Church People Under Aquino Administration". Parables and Miracles, January to March 1990, Vol. IV, No. 1. pages 13 and 16. Promotion of Church Peoples' Rights. 1840 E. Rodriguez Avenue, Quezon City, Philippines.

SUMMARY REPORT

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHURCH PEOPLE UNDER THE AQUINO ADMINISTRATION (1986-1989)

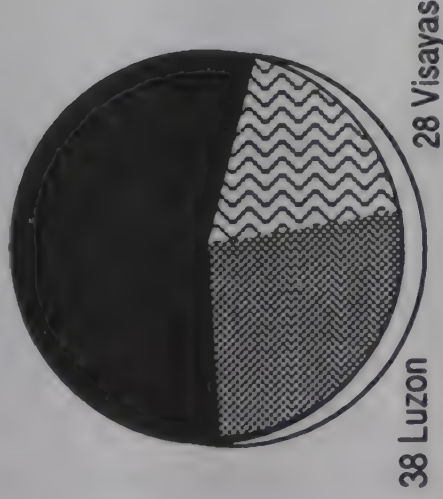
DISTRIBUTION OF VICTIMS
(by vocations)

115 church workers



DISTRIBUTION OF CASES
(by geographical areas)

77 Mindanao



DISTRIBUTION OF CASES
(by types of perpetrators)

80 military



General References:

- Crisis and Instability: The Philippines Enters the Nineties, by
Thomas O'Brien, M.M. Philippine International Forum, P.O.
Box 375, Davao City 8000, Philippines, 1990 (85 pages).
- Church Trends, No. 1 (cited above).
- Justice and Peace Review 1990 Special Issue (cited above).

APPENDIX 1

How the Law Works: the Legal Case Against M.V. Cassandra Owner

In an attempt to pressure the Philippine shipping industry to exercise responsibility in the transport of passengers, the Philippine Province of the Good Shepherd Sisters and the families of their four members who perished in the Doña Cassandra sinking decided to file legal proceedings. The case was filed in December, 1983 as a "Breach of Contract of Carriage" and was given the status of civil case No. 2546 in the Batangas City Court.

The final decision came only after seven years of court deliberation, costing the congregation more than P200,000, plus additional immeasurable anguish, inconvenience and expense to the families of the four sisters.

In the final court decision made on April 3, 1990, the families of three of the sisters were awarded P30,000 (US\$1,300 at that time) as actual and compensatory damages. Also the families' costs for litigation and attorney's fees were reimbursed. The father of Sister Mary Concepcion Conti, RGS was awarded an additional P50,000 (US\$2,272) as moral damages. This was because he was the only plaintiff who testified in the trial of the case. His testimony showed that the death of his daughter caused him and

his family to suffer pain, mental anguish and moral shock which therefore entitled him to the payment of moral damages.

Obviously the legal proceedings proved to be no deterrence to the Carlos A. Gothong Lines, Inc., the owner of the M.V. Doña Cassandra. The decision neither forced or even pressured them to improve the seaworthiness of their ships or to provide adequate safety provisions, nor did it impose financial punishment on the company which would make future accidents bad business for them. At worst, the legal proceedings were, for them, an annoyance. At best, the owners of Gothong Shipping Lines and other shipping line owners were once again the victors. The political-economic systems in the Philippines protected their interests at the expense of disaster and death to the victims, the millions of Filipinos who have no other choice in the selection of transportation when they need to travel from one island to another.

The victims whose families could not pursue legal action received less or nothing; for many, even the acknowledgment that their loved ones were actually passengers of the Cassandra was denied them. They simply disappeared in the Pacific Deep.

APPENDIX 2

Solidarity: What It Means

Jan Schrama, MSC

Nanette's life and death and that of her companions in the Cassandra was the result and expression of their Christian faith in the context of solidarity. To provide an example of what this means, some excerpts of Jan Schrama's reflection with young members of his religious congregation are shared.

I came to the Philippines a long time ago, in 1962. Although I had studied modern theology (at least, that was what I thought to be), soon I was swallowed up by the practice of those days: the very traditional and sacramentalistic approach. With a strong emphasis on the administering of the sacraments, one did not easily focus on the real problems of society. In our seminary days, we were not taught socio-political involvement. In fact, when I was a parish priest in Aras-asan, Surigao del Sur, I was much closer to the owner of the logging concession than to the workers. Meanwhile I knew that the workers were not being paid on time, and I did not have the courage to defend their rights.

I was very fortunate to stay at the scholasticate during the late sixties and the early seventies, during the First Quarter Storm. Influenced by the student movements, and particularly by our own MSC scholastics, I discovered little by little the real problems of Philippine society. It was a slow process. We did not call it

“preferential option for the poor” but it boiled down to that. Not in an abstract way but contextualized in the Philippine situation, where the poor masses had started their long march towards liberation. Inspired by our students and by young Filipino priests, I was convinced that we as religious were called to support the aspirations of the poor peasants and workers.

At the same time, my understanding of being a missionary changed. I discovered the supportive role of a foreign missionary in building the local church and that, therefore, being a missionary does not necessarily mean staying on for life. I experienced that many foreign missionaries did not play a positive role in promoting the social involvement of the church. These experiences and reflections affected me more and more and eventually they made me decide to go back to The Netherlands as soon as a Filipino MSC could replace me at the scholasticate.

“My understanding of being a missionary changed. I discovered the supportive role of a foreign missionary in building the local church and that, therefore, being a missionary does not necessarily mean staying on for life.”

Back in the Netherlands, I did not opt for parish work. I wanted to use my Philippine experience more directly. I was convinced that with my “Third World outlook”, I could analyze the Dutch society, which is a rich society and which plays an active role in keeping Third World countries dependent. Therefore, I felt happy when I got the job of Mission Secretary in one of the dioceses in The Netherlands. My basic task was to accompany and to guide missionary and Third World groups in their orientation and activities. It was a pastoral task with an emphasis on the social dimension.

My vision on the church continued to change. More and more I came to see the task of the church in terms of supportive participation in the struggle of marginalized groups in society, not only in the Third World but also in The Netherlands. So it happened that together with a number of companions I became involved in the problem of Moroccan migrant workers. Out of solidarity, we even joined their hunger strike. At first I was very scared because it was a new action-model for me. But at the same time, I realized that this kind of involvement helped raise my consciousness, something which might never have happened through churchy discussions only.

In 1975, we started the Dutch solidarity group for the struggle of the Filipino people. We were a small, inexperienced group. The main realities we had in common were our love for the Filipino people and the anger we felt upon seeing their oppression. Although I joined the group motivated by my religious commitment, the group as a whole was not based on Christian principles but on a common socio-political orientation. Again, we considered our role as a modest support to the home front, where the struggle for liberation had to be waged: the Philippines.

"Theoretically I know very well that social involvement is not enough to justify religious life. We must continue to search for the religious depth of our commitment."

Our group grew stronger, and the Philippine issue became more internationally known, mainly as a result of the developments that took place in the Philippines. The solidarity work demanded more attention. I was therefore extremely grateful to the Dutch Province when in 1984 they allowed me to do solidarity work on a full-time basis and to fully commit myself to

Filipino migrant workers in Western Europe. In the Dutch MSC Province, it has been acknowledged that through my orientation and work, and through the involvement of confreres in similar work, we are developing a new thrust. But very often a statement like this remains a theory. In practice, we are floating at the periphery of the Province....

I realize that my development has been one-sided. The Philippine MSC Province document on The Transformation of Society and the one on Developing Communities of Faith are supposed to be complementary, but in my personal life I have not yet found that balance. According to my own faith experience, I am still in the phase of shedding off the feudal, capitalistic and bourgeois forms of a religion which too often have become an instrument to maintain the established order and to oppress the poor. If we want to revolutionize society for the sake of justice and freedom, then religion too needs to be revolutionized and Christ needs to be re-incarnated in a genuine way.

Theoretically I know very well that social involvement is not enough to justify religious life. We must continue to search for the religious depth of our commitment....

APPENDIX 3

Solidarity: Some Organizational Expressions

SNVR

The Association of Women Religious in the Netherlands is a union of over 80 congregations of active women religious. Members of these communities total about 18,500. The SNVR wants to serve the communal and personal interests of its members with the general purpose: "Together on the way to the deepening and renewal of religious life."

THE MISSIONARY CENTER

In 1977 The Missionary Center was founded at Heerlen, The Netherlands by some orders and congregations. Membership in this group which supports mission work financially and through solidarity has expanded to 47 orders and congregations of Holland.

The Missionary Center works on a national basis and is active in three fields: staff training, documentation, and collecting and lending of written and audio-visual materials about the Third World and about social problems in the Netherlands. As much as possible the work is carried out in support, in the first place, for groups and individuals who want to contribute to a more livable world for all people.

THE WEEK FOR DUTCH MISSIONARIES

This national episcopal event presided over by Msgr. J. Bluysen is held yearly during week before Pentecost Sunday. It is a week during which the Dutch Catholic community expresses its co-responsibility for, and its solidarity with "people with mission." In all parishes the special Pentecost Sunday collection is held. Also through a letter of appeal, other tens of thousands send their gifts. The money thus collected is destined for the personal well-being and renewal needs of as many as 4,000 Dutch religious and lay missionaries. The first objective is to enable missionaries to have a holiday every three or four years without being a financial burden for their relatives or friends. But it also is used to finance courses, to maintain the special reading center and its own monthly publication from The Netherlands, as well as other projects. "The Week for the Dutch Missionaries" publishes reliable information about missionaries. This booklet is an example of that. Responsibility for "The Week for the Dutch Missionaries" is entrusted to the Central Mission Commissariat, the foundation which, together with Dutch religious orders and congregations and other institutes, serve the needs and interests of Dutch missionaries.

PHILIPPINE INTERNATIONAL FORUM:

The Philippine International Forum (PIF) is a network of foreign residents of the Philippines who are committed to solidarity with the Filipino people in their struggle for life, justice and self-determination. PIF members reach out to people in their home countries to inform them about Philippine realities and invite them to join in efforts to support the Filipino people.

FOCUS AND RATIONALE

Involvement by foreign residents in international solidarity work is particularly urgent at this time when Philippine self-determination is threatened by ongoing political, economic and military intervention. Because of their first-hand knowledge and

experience of the Philippines, foreign residents are in a unique position to interpret what is happening for people in their home countries, and to mobilize public opinion and international pressure against such intervention.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To facilitate coordinated and systematic involvement by foreign residents in international solidarity work in support of the struggle of the Filipino people for justice and self-determination.
2. To be a forum where foreign residents can assist one another to analyze Philippine realities, plan effective international solidarity responses and provide mutual support during this period of intensifying conflict in the Philippines.

APPENDIX 4

About the Contributors

Tom Claessens is the Director of Central Mission Commissariat (Dutch National Mission Institute) of The Netherlands. Tom is a theologian whose socio-pastoral interest is on the emerging churches of the Third World Church of the Poor.

Mary Grenough, MM is a Maryknoll Sister from the U. S. who was assigned to the Philippines in 1963. Her first ten years were spent on the island of Negros where she was a nurse supervisor in a general hospital for six years, then became part of the Bacolod Diocese Office of Social Action staff. In 1973 she joined the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines as a member of the health team. She first met Nanette in 1972 when, as a Council member, she came to Escalante to make a visitation. When Nanette herself was assigned to Negros, they met again and maintained meaningful contact with each other. During the ten years of Nanette's life in the Philippines they shared much in common: friendship, membership in the Rural Missionaries, work with the community-based health program, vision, struggles and hopes.

Annelies van Heijst is a lay theologian who has served as the education director of the SNVR (Association of Women Religious in The Netherlands) since 1980. Annelies was a student of Christina Malhes, the first professor of feminist theology at the

Catholic University of Nymegen, and wrote her thesis on the topic of active women religious in the Netherlands.

Martin Jansen is a free lance journalist from The Netherlands who specializes in coverage of Third World issues.

Jan Schrama, MSC was born in The Netherlands where he joined the MSC Congregation (Sacred Heart Fathers) in 1951 and was ordained as a priest in 1957. In 1962 he was assigned to the Philippines where, during the succeeding ten years he served in various capacities in the eastern part of Mindanao. For the first five years he did pastoral work in Surigao. Then he served as secretary to Bishop Carlos van den Ouwelant. From 1967 to 1973 Jan's major responsibilities were in the MSC seminary formation program, theology level. His ministries in The Netherlands since 1973 have been described in his reflection, "Solidarity: What It Means" (pages 97-100).





ISBN 971-501-438-0

This book should be read especially by Superiors to help them understand the call of Sisters to be with the poor, even at the risk of criticism, of alienation from other members of the Congregation. It should help them not only allow, but to encourage their members to respond to the call of the poor.

Nanette's life is like a beacon star that can guide us so we do not forget the basic call of a missionary – to be with and serve the poor. This was her faith imperative. She had to walk alone in the way she saw the light. When Nanette expressed a desire to join the Rural Missionaries, it was my privilege to accept her. I immediately welcomed her.

Nanette was a foreign missionary who gave herself totally to an option she knew to be risky. She truly became a servant among our people. She shared deeply their hopes, their suffering and agonies, and became truly part of the soul of the Filipino people.

– Sister Asuncion Martinez, ICM
RMP Vice Chairperson, 1971–76

This booklet contains the story of a Dutch missionary in the Philippines, Sister Nanette Berentsen. It is a testimony of a woman who in the eyes of many was a martyr and a prophet. At the same time we get a picture of the suffering Filipino people in their quest for true liberation, and the rotten system that tries to shatter that aspiration.

We as Carmelites have lived and worked with her. Many times she said that conflicts, differences and doubts have to be struggled out with patience and that this eventually will lead to genuine sister- and brotherhood.

Her spirit of solidarity with the struggling Filipino people, like that of our confrere Simon Westendorp, who perished with her in the same tragedy, continues to live among us.

– Fr. Crispin Offermanns, O.Carm.
Provincial, Philippines

Sister Nanette's contribution to the CBHPs in the Philippines is rooted in her dedication to the cause of social transformation, justice and people's empowerment. This was most evident in her sense of urgency and the way she set an example to her co-workers as she pioneered the community-based approach in Northern Mindanao and popularized its concepts especially among the local church-bishops, co-religious, priests, as well as lay leaders and health professionals in the whole island. Especially remembered by her co-workers is the way she always had the time to listen and help everyone with any problem no matter how small or trivial.

– Magdalena A. Barcelon, M.D.
Council for Health and Development



Rural Missionaries of the Philippines

and



Claretian Publications